Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

JULY 1968
60¢

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by
FRITZ LEIBER

Factsheet Six
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JOHN BRUNNER

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by
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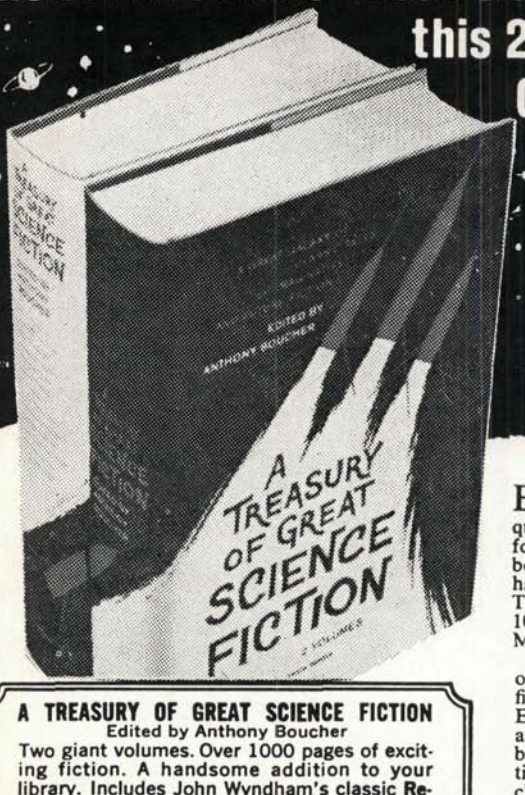

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Galaxy MAGAZINE

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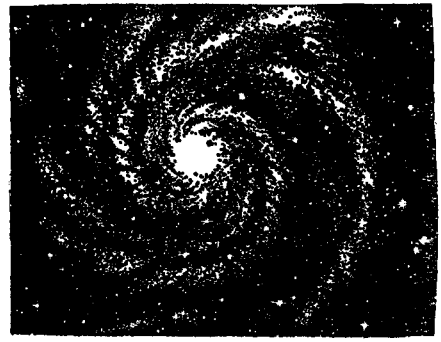

July, 1968 ● Vol. 26, No. 6

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THE WEEK THAT WAS

As this issue of Galaxy goes to press, we are just completing a rather confusing week. Two events in particular have given us surprises — the apparent beginning of peace negotiations in Vietnam, and the opening of the long-awaited science-fiction movie, 2001 — *A Space Odyssey*.

As to Vietnam — well, as you know, we don't usually use this space to talk about mere 20th century problems, preferring to confine our crystal ball gazing to more remote eras. But those of you who read last month's *Galaxy* will remember that, triggered by two advertisements placed by groups of science-fiction writers, one in favor of an immediate end to the Vietnam war and the other opposed, we decided to put the resourcefulness of science-fiction writers, readers and others involved to the test: we began then, and continue now, a contest inviting you and everyone else interested to offer fresh ideas on what to do about Vietnam.

By the time you read this (there's a natural two-month lag involved))the whole thing may be a dead issue. Or it may not. (Our crystal ball won't focus down that fine!)

But it seems clear that all the fresh ideas and provocative suggestions that can be made will still be very useful. If the Vietnam war ended tomorrow there would still be a need for new ways of dealing with armed conflicts. So the contest goes on . . . and so do our plans for submitting whatever ideas we can get to a panel of experts, in the hope of making some of them practical and useful as well as original . . .

In other words, if you were going to enter don't be deterred by anything that may have happened in real time!

As to 2001, there's a review of it on pp 193-194; we won't attempt another one here. But here too at least one thing seems clear in a confusing situation: the science-fiction movie we've all been waiting for still hasn't come along.

We think it's a disgrace that the most recent science-fiction movie made with a big budget, good actors and an actual sf writer preparing the script, not aimed at a juvenile market and uncontaminated by camp, is *Things to Come* . . . produced in 1936.

For heaven's sake, *why?*

—THE EDITOR

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What Would YOU Do About Vietnam?

Assume you are being asked for advice. Assume the people who ask you are the President of the United States, the Congress, the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff — anyone and/or everyone who has any decision-making authority concerning American involvement in Vietnam. Assume they want *one* suggestion from you . . . and assume they will follow it.

What would you tell them to do?

Don't tell them. Tell us. We will take the most provocative and seemingly productive suggestions received, submit them to problem-solving analysis, and present the results in a forthcoming issue of *Galaxy*.

The Rules

1. Anyone is eligible to enter, and may submit as many entries as he likes. Each entry must be on a separate sheet of paper, one side only, and include your name and address. All entries will become the property of Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Please limit yourself to a maximum of 100 words for each entry, preferably in the form of (a) your suggestion, (b) followed, if you wish, by a statement of why you think it worth doing.

2. Suggestions may be on any area of American involvement in Vietnam — ways of winning the war, ways of bringing about a peaceful settlement, whatever you think would be of value.

3. Five prizes of $100 each will be awarded to those entries which, in the opinion of the judges, best deserve them. In the event of duplicate suggestions, the first entries received will get the prize. Judges will consist of, or be appointed by, the Editors of Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Winners will be notified by mail, and their names will be published in a forthcoming issue of this magazine.

4. Send your entries to: "What Would You Do About Vietnam?", Galaxy Publishing Corporation, 421 Hudson Street, New York, N.Y. 10014. Entries must be received by July 4th, 1968, to be eligible for prizes.

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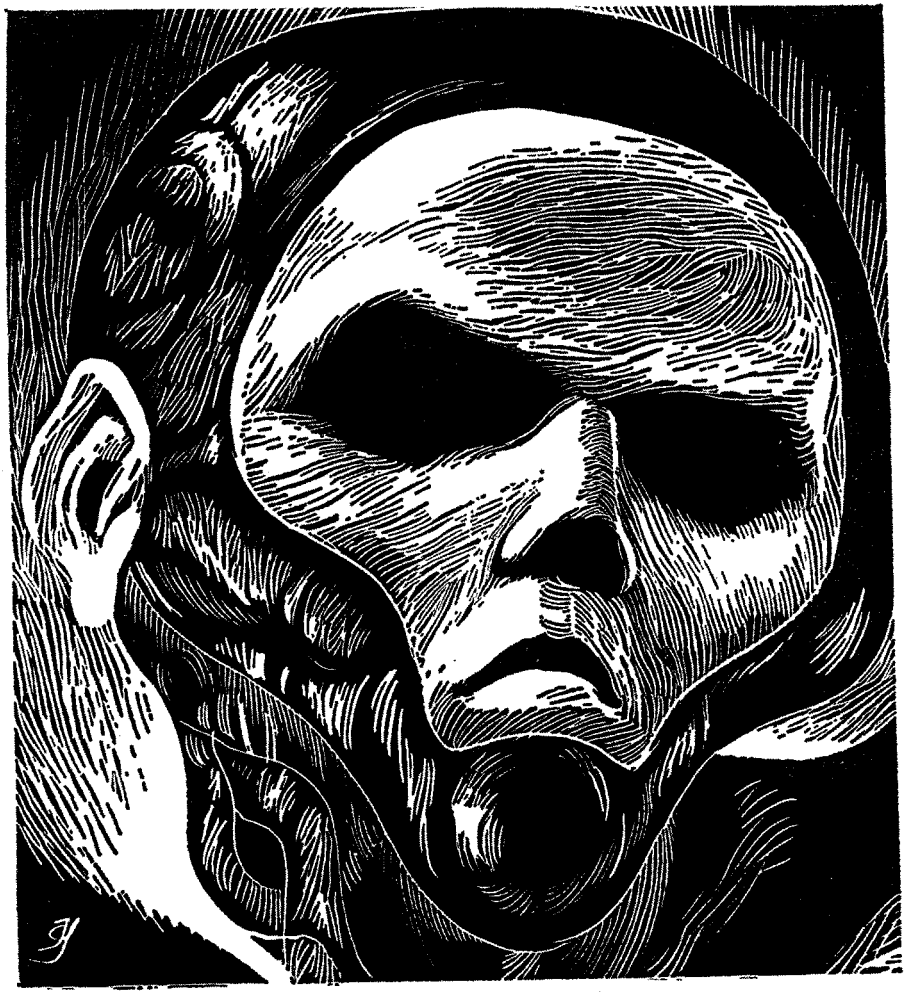

A SPECTER IS

Scully found a pliant, eight-foot-two maid in Dallas Texas, Texas. She cast him as a Circum-lunar Skeleton in a play of politics gone mad!

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HAUNTING TEXAS

by FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

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I

TERRIBLE TERRA

"Son, you look like a Texan what got the hormone, but been starved since birth. Like your Ma, Lyndon bless her, lifted a leg and dropped you into a big black bag, and after you nothing but a crust and mini-carton of milk once a month."

"True enough, noble sir. I was raised in the Sack and I am a Thin," I answered the Portly Giant in a voice like distant thunder, which almost made me wet my tights, because up until this moment of my life I had been a high baritone.

My senses told me I was whirling at a punishing six lunagravs in a large cubical centrifuge. In fact, I could see the spinning and feel it in my inner ears until my senses gradually adjusted. On the same surface as I, were two giants and a giantess in cowboy costumes and also three barefoot, hunchbacked, swarthy dwarfs in dirty shirts and pants. They were all poised expertly on their feet, riding the centrifuge with elan. While under my black hood and cloak I was doubled up like a large bone-and-titanium lazy-tongs, trying to make the left knee-motor of my exoskeleton behave — it either hunted wildly or wouldn't respond at all to the myoelectric impulses from the ghost-muscles of my left leg.

I realized that the Portly Giant must have seen me without my cloak, which now might be hiding an erect short Fat as readily as a folded tall Thin.

I was hazy about how I'd debarked from the *Tsiolkovsky*. When the Longhairs dope you to take accelerations of 24 lungravs, they don't use aspirin. Even when you're sandwiched between water mattresses.

But I knew that outside the centrifuge lay the spaceport and city of Yellowknife, Canada, Terra.

The centrifuge's two ends and two adjoining sides (but which were which?) were covered with a child-simple mural of huge chalk-white cowboys on horses like elephants chasing tiny lipstick-red Indians on ponies like chihuahua dogs across a cactus-studded landscape. This battle of cockroaches and behemoths was signed with a huge "Grandma Aaron." The figures and scene seemed as inappropriate for frosty Yellowknife as my companions' costumes, which should have been parkas and snowshoes.

But who is a greenhorn, who has lived all his life in free fall a few thousand miles from Mother Luna, to pronounce on the customs of Terrible Terra?

The opposite surface was

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crowded with dazzling sunbursts, like a star cluster going nova.

In one of the adjoining surfaces were two rectangular openings side by side. Each was three feet wide, but one was more than ten feet long, the other less than five. I peered into them in vain to see stars or sections of Terra whipping past, but the rectangles were only hatches leading into another part of the centrifuge. Why there were two and so different in shape and size, where one would have done, I couldn't imagine.

As I tried to coax my knee-motor properly alive and felt the six centrifugal lunagravs cruelly press the support bands of my exoskeleton into my skin and bones at armpits, thighs, crotch, *etcetera,* I asked myself: If this is what they use to toughen you up for Terra, what will Terra's naked surface be like?

Meanwhile I spoke aloud in the same inaudibly deep voice-from-grave, which indeed fitted my appearance of a black-shrouded burial mound with the central bump of my hooded head. I asked, "Kindly direct me to the Yellowknife Registry of Mining Claims."

The Portly Giant regarded me with benign interest. That one really rode the centrifuge with serenity. I marveled at his ability to handle so casually a mass at least five times my own *with* exoskeleton. The three shoulder-bent dwarfs peered apprehensively from close behind him, fear-frowns furrowing their low foreheads under their greasy black hair. The Square Giant — I called him that because he was all sharp shoulder- and jaw-angles, like William S. Hart of ancientest cinema — glanced up suspiciously from my open luggage.

The Giantess went into a tizzy.

"There you go again!" she whined. "I try to hostess you the best I can. After all, you're our first visitor from space in a hundred years. But you keep booming at me like all the rest of them fearful furry Russians and drumming Afric foreigners. And you keep booming mysteries. Where in the name of Jack is Yellowknife?"

She had long yellow hair outside and big tits, or their simulacrums, inside her quasi-military, mini-skirted cowgirl costume; but her fluttery stupidity was flattening my libido as well as my sanity. I recalled my father telling me that drum majorettes had been one of the chief ruinations of Terra, along with female-clad Communist athletes of whichever sex.

"Here!" I thunder-rumbled from my hood. "Right here, where the *Tsiolvoksky* debarked me on direct orbit from Circumluna. In-

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cidentally, I'm not Russian, but of Anglo-Hispanic ancestry, though it's true there are as many Russians as Americans in Circumluna."

"The *Tchaikovsky* debarked you all right — in a stretcher, in case you've forgotten, and all wrapped up in that black blanket, like a candidate for a coffin. Say, what are Mericans? Ancient greasers? But what I mostly meant to ask you was: Where do you think *here* is?"

"*Tsiolkovsky!*" I thunder-corrected. My new double-base voice was making me nasty. "Great space pioneer, not gay composer of slurpy music. And Americans. A-m-e-r-i-c-a-n-s. While *here,*" I thunder-crashed, "is Spaceport Yellowknife, Northwest Territory, Canada, Terra!"

"Name of Jack and Jackie!" she wailed, clapping her hands to her ears. "Where and what is Canada?"

The Square Giant looked up again and asked ominously, "Stranger, why does your luggage consist chiefly of 47 isotopic and lithium-gold batteries of the sort used in portable power weapons?"

"They're spares for my exo-skeleton," I tossed him, while at the Giantess I rumbled scornfully, "Don't they teach you any geography on this planet? You a space hostess!"

"It's you don't know geography," she whimpered back at me, still holding her ears. "Up there in space, jumping from star to star and never caring which. Gun you, you're making me cry, you animated black laundry basket!" Whereupon very large tears did begin to plop from the inner corners of her blue eyes.

If only the centrifuge would stop, I thought. I could no longer see spin, but I was whirling inside.

"Stranger, what class of weapon is an X-O-Skeleton?" the Square Giant demanded, his mouth and eyes thinning to slits. "And watch your language when conversing with a cultured lady."

"You'll find out when you're kicked by one!" I snarled, meaning Faithful Old Titanium, not that female boob. "Cultured lady!" I continued zestfully. "Cultured in an algae vat! You yeast-brain, how can you and that right-angle cowpoke mention culture when you confuse satellites with stellar furnaces, don't know where Canada is, don't understand the needs of a Thin visiting a solar gravity satellite and are unfamiliar with well known prosthetic devices?"

The Giantess began to blubber. The fright-frowns deepened and rose in the dwarfs' foreheads, their greasy hair stirred, and their flight-muscles tightened.

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...fruitful plains, waving with amber grain, cattle-nurturing thornless cactus, the pseudopods of nutritious amoebae, and Lone Star flags.

Ever since Lyndon ousted Jack in the Early Atomic Age, the term of a President of Texas has been from inauguration to assassination. Murder is merely the continuation of politics by other means.

Power ennobles, but Petrolium Power ennobles absolutely.

The end of life is liberty. Texans are empowered to enjoy, exploit and handle liberty; while Mexes, Injuns, and Nigras—all those having dark faces or a dark hole in their pocketbooks—have the privilege of serving liberty and keeping their hands off it.

Ego was made to be used. It rises from the dark unconscious, energizes awareness and transforms society. It is the oilfields of the human personality.

Longhairs have less brains than longhorns and less ability to stand on their own hind legs. Most Longhairs perished in the Atomic War or were exiled to that sick-cow-corral, Circumluna, and her unspeakable udder, the Sack. Praise the Lord and Puff the marijuana!

The Battles of the Alamo, San Jacinto, El Salvador, Sioux City, Schenectady, and Saskatchewan . . .

—random excerpt from *How to Stand and Understand Texans: Their Fantasies, Foibles, Folkways, and Fixed Ideas as Seen in Their Own Writings*, Nitty-Gritty Press, Watts-Angeles, Acificpay Ackblay Epublicray

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The Square Giant whipped from his belt a lightning-pistol I knew could numb or fry me, according to how much power he used. He took a step toward me and barked, "Hand over that X-O-Skeleton, Stranger, without you cock it. And whatever other weapons you're hiding under that black serape. Everything down to hatpins and pinknives is confiscated at the Republic's borders — you'll get claim checks. But don't make any sudden movements!"

The tension sizzled. I stayed squat-crouched under my cloak and prepared to spit more insults from my hood. In fact, something violent might well have happened, most likely to me, if the Portly Giant hadn't intervened.

That one said in resonant, relaxed tones that muffed not a word (I'd been suspecting he was a fellow actor), "Simmer down, all of you, for Lyndon's sake, that secular saint of peace. There's been some natural mistakes made and some natural tempers roused. Bill, go easy with that shock-spitter. And, Suzy, sweetheart, dry your tears and unsnuffle that cute little nose of yours.

"Scully," he addressed to me, "Scully — for that's what you look like from what I can glimpse of your face, a sort of sensitive-featured skull. No offense intended! My own handle's Elmo, and I'm as fat as and got a face like a hog, cross-bred with a hyena. But well, Scully, I'm afraid that they truly didn't teach you quite all of modern geography up there in the sky. Yep, there's a few things been happening here and there on this little old planet during the century you been sailing around the moon in your ivory tower with its attendant soap bubbles.

"Because there *is* a Yellowknife, you see, Scully, but now we call it Amarillo Cuchillo, and it's situated in Northern Texas. While Canada is a gone land, like Sumeria or Burgundy or Vietnam."

A cold and dizzy feeling — as if I hadn't been centrifuged dizzy enough — touched me. A feeling of history altering like the colors in a kaleidescope and no patch of reality sure. I already knew, you see, that my father, who taught me everything, was weak on recent Terran geography and history, though expert in historical dramas and over-all theory. He would wave at Spengler's dog-eared, accordion-opened *Decline of the West* floating by our book-rack, then through the curving wall of the Sack at Terra splendid against the stars, and say, "They are all fellahin down there, Christopher, all of them. Fellahin swarming like moths over the embers of dead cultures. Ah, tomorrow and tomorrow and to-

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morrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day." (What is moths?) A picturesque and even ego-inflating generality, especially to one living a quarter of a million miles or so from Earth, but admittedly weak on details.

And now at last I was learning just *how* weak.

I looked up apprehensively at Elmo as the Portly Giant continued, "And I'm afraid, Scully, that the Russo-Yankee officers of the *Tsiolkovsky* are a little feeble on modern politico-geography too, because where they landed you — namely, here — is some two thousand miles south of Amarillo Cuchillo. Scully, my friend, you have the honor of being in Dallas, Texas, Texas — the heart of the human universe and the golden laurel-crown of her culture."

"Texas includes Canada?" I asked in a quavering base. "Is an independent nation?"

"Scully, I hate to voice the least criticism of a man's educational background — shucks, there's been notable brains 'mongst refugees from New York City College and Berkeley — but I do believe your heavenly geography instructors have been notably remiss and maybe — no offense meant here neither — touched with Black or Slavic bias.

"Scully son, ever since the Great Texasward Industrial Migration and World War Three, Texas has extended from the Nicaraguan Canal to the North Pole, including most of Central America, all of Mexico, nearly all of Canada and all that matters of the Flibberty-gibbet Forty-Seven — I mean the former United States of America.

"That is, at present. We Texans might take a fancy to extend our boundaries any day. There's Cuba to be reconquered and Indo-China and Ireland and Hawaii and Hither Siberia.

"But on the whole, we Texans are a peaceable, tolerant, shoot-and-let-shoot people. We whipped the Cherokees and the Mexicans, and we tied the Russians and Chinese, and we're inclined to rest on our laurels — unless, of course, roused, when we get dynamic as an automated cotton-picking rig goosed by the program for an Irish jig.

"But as for being independent, let me tell you, Scully my boy, Texas is the goldurnedest independentest nation in the entire annals of political science. Nobody, bar some wise old Hellenes, really understood what individual freedom meant until Texas came along. But anyhow, welcome to Texas, Scully, welcome to God's Planet! Welcome down from the vastness of space, *amigo* — though you know, Scully, there's really more functional space in

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Texas than there is in the entire twiddling universe of free fall and galaxies and other foolishness. So in Lyndon's name lift yourself up from that black heap you're in, boy, and put her here!" (Now I was sure he was an actor, though of ancient oratorical school.)

He advanced, followed closely by the swarthy dwarfs, acting like timid children, and held out toward me a big open hand.

I did not respond, though truly touched by his hammy hospitality. (At heart all actors are hams and love it.)

I was simply too tired and dizzy.

For many minutes I had been balancing hunched-crouched in a souped-up crazy-house of a centrifuge that was making my brain woozy as well as drowning my meager flesh in fatigue poisons. I had been fumbling futilely with tiring fingers at my balky knee-motor. I had been forcing my aching diaphragm to drag into my burning lungs an atmosphere like yeast stew flavored with hydrogen sulphide. I had been putting up with rude nonsense from a dithery female and a fake cowboy baggage inspector. I was still groggy from anti-grav drugs and bone-crushing, organ-popping accelerations aboard the *Tsiolkovsky*.

I had become deadly sick of Terra while they were still getting me ready for her.

So now this news that I'd been stranded two thousand gravity-paved miles from my destination was the last weight, you might say, in my centrifuge training-belt.

(The centrifuge on Circumluna only builds up to two luna-gravs, and I'd weighted my exo-skeleton to make it nearer earth-grav.)

"My unfolded handle is Elmo Oilfield Earp, lineal descendant of the noted gunslinger," the Portly Giant coaxed. "What's yours, Scully?"

At that instant a second female waltzed into our section of the centrifuge through the shorter of the two side-by-side hatches. At the sight of her, my spirits sky-rocketed as if I'd just got simultaneous shots of speed-euphorin in seven different veins or been invited by Idris McIllwraith into her cubical to help her dress for Eve in Shaw's *Back to* Methuse-*lah*. What is it that some girls have can turn me on? — while the yellow-haired, tearful, sincere, big-tit Susies can extinguish me. I know, sex.

This new girl was dark as the hunchbacked dwarfs, and she wasn't too much more than four feet tall; but she carried herself as if she were ten, her back flag-staff-straight with her glossy

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black hair for a banner. She had a form like a scaled-down Venus de Milo. She was shod with gleaming black slippers with heels almost as high as her dainty feet were long. A red skirt swirled around her black-netted dancer's legs, a yellow blouse bared her coffee-and-cream shoulders, while her dark eyes snapped bright black light as castanets do bright black sound.

I was so taken with her mere looks that I forgot to admire the skill with which she moved gracefully across areas having different acceleration vectors.

And then she gave it to me. The eye, I mean. Yes, she halted in mid-twirl, and she looked at me — yes, at miserable me, huddled under my cloak like a sick giant spider monkey — and then her delicious eyes were fixed on my hooded, deep-socketed ones and glowing love into me, while her previously saucy lips were parted in a rapt smile of delight, as if I were the answer to some extremely private dream she'd been having ever since the first downy shiver of puberty.

My depression vanished like black magic routed by the White Goddess leading a train of nymphomaniac nymphs. What were six lunagravs? Terra was mine! I was the Count of Monte Cristo! — a part I have twice played already.

Still operating wholly under my cloak, I untelescoped slim canes from my titanium exo-forearm-bones and with them and my good leg pushed myself erect and then still more erect until my head was on a level with those of the giants. The dwarfs' eyes, steadily widening, followed me up. I noted that although they were of different heights, the dwarfs were all shoulder-bent to an equal four and a half feet — an odd detail.

Once fully erect — now I topped the giants by a half head — I pushed down bolts to lock both knee-joints of my exoskeleton and stood on my two feet only, my exo-legs rigid rods from ankle to hip. Though teetery, it was practical — the taller the object, the easier it is to balance. I quickly retelescoped my canes — if Bill the Square Giant glimpsed them, he would surely cry, "Concealed weapons!"

Meanwhile Elmo was calling to my vest-pocket Carmen, "Well, it's about time, Kookie. You better have those reefers, or I'll turn you up and tan your Persian-rose-petal hide. Oh Scully, this is La Cucaracha, one of my sociable secretaries. Kookie, this is my bosom friend Scully from outer space. Treat him as you would the President of Texas before he went crackers."

Ignoring these rude and bois-

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terous, though apparently well meant remarks, I stepped out swiftly and reached my dark lovely one in three long strides and bowed until my hooded face was level with hers. Considering I had no knees at the time, it was a remarkable performance, putting my black-shrouded butt a couple of feet higher than my head. My myoelectricity was tuning my stiff-kneed exoskeleton to perfection. It was truly a grand gesture, executed with ultimate poise and panache.

Thrusting a hand from my cloak, I plucked hold of her dainty one as if it were a dark orchid — and it was, an velvet-surfaced, manipulative multi-wand!

"Senorita Cockroach *sublima,*" I rumbled throatily (and even the muted thunder of my rumble didn't faze her). "I am Christopher Crockett La Cruz, totally at your service!" And I drew the captured bloom into my hood and showered kisses on it.

She, in the intervals of a flattered laugh and with much rippling of long black eyelashes, whispered toward my ear in a voice very fast and businesslike, though tender, "At moonrise tonight, *amado.* At the bandstand corner of the cemetery, *querido mio.* Until then — *silencio!*"

It is the proper function of woman to attend to the practical details of affairs of the heart.

Assured by her words that I was not only loved but desired, I put into my obediently whispered, *Si, si, si!*" the hiss of a love-struck micrometeorite whizzing through the self-sealing duraplast of one of the eggs forming the Sack.

Then I returned her hand to her with a flourish, un-jackknifed to normal height and turned toward the others.

I felt as if I had just magnificently rendered one of Hamlet's soliloquies or Cyrano's tirades and the applause was about to break from the doubly-curving walls of our free-fall theater-in-the-sphere in the largest bubble of the Sack. An inner voice said, "Stop your skulking masquerade, Scully-Christopher. Show yourself fully to these miserable earthlings and your dainty beloved."

With a Dracula batwing swirl, I threw back my black cloak and hood, flashing their scarlet linings, and waited for the gasps of admiration.

Suzy wailed, "Holy Halloween!", vanished her large blue irises upward and fainted. As he caught her, Bill yelled, "What'd I tell you? — he's got power-armor!" While the three dwarfs jumped backward and, I do believe, would have dashed in terror from the room except that Elmo

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reached behind him and neatly collared them, meanwhile scowling at me incredulously. One of the captured dwarfs quavered, *"La Muerte Alta!"* Another gasped, *"El Espectro!"* While the third stuttered, *El Esqueleto!"*

Being called a tall death, a specter and a skeleton irked me greatly. To have people scared of one (unless the part calls for it) when one is a fine, loving chap and for lagniappe a great actor is most irritating.

But before saying anything cutting, anything with acid in it, I put myself in their places and rapidly looked at me.

They were looking, I discovered, at a handsome, shapely, dramatic-featured man 8 feet 8 inches tall and massing 147 pounds with and 97 pounds without his exoskeleton. Except for relaxed tiny bulges of muscle in forearms and calves (latter to work lengthy toes, useful in gripping), this man was composed of skin, bones, ligaments, fasciae, narrow arteries and veins, nerves, small-size assorted inner organs, ghost muscles and a big-domed skull with two bumps of jaw muscle. He was wearing a skin-tight black suit that left bare only his sunken-cheeked, deep-eyed, beautiful tragic face and big, heavy-tendoned hands.

This truly magnificent, romantically handsome, rather lean man was standing on two corrugated-soled titanium footplates. From the outer edge of each rose a narrow titanium T beam that followed the line of his leg, with a joint (locked now) at the knee, up to another joint with a titanium pelvic girdle and shallow belly support. From the back of this girdle a T spine rose to support a shoulder yoke and rib cage, all of the same metal. The rib cage was artistically slotted to save weight, so that curving strips followed the line of each of his very prominent ribs.

A continuation of his T spine up the back of his neck in turn supported a snug, gleaming head-basket that rose behind to curve over his shaven cranium, but in front was little more than a jaw-shelf and two inward-curving cheek-plates stopping just short of his somewhat rudimentary nose. The nose is not needed in Circumluna to warm or cool air.)

Slightly lighter T beams than those for his legs reinforced his arms and housed in their terminal inches his telescoping canes. Numerous black, foam-padded bands attached this whole framework to him.

A most beautiful prosthetic, one had to admit. While to expect a Thin, or even more a Fat, from a free-fall environment to function without one on a gravity planet or in a centrifuge would be the

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ultimate in cornball ignorance.

Eight small electric motors at the principle joints worked the prosthetic framework by means of steel cables riding in the angles of the T beams, much like antique dentists' drills were worked, I've read. The motors were controlled by myoelectric impulses from his ghost-muscles, transmitted by sensitive pick-ups buried in the foam-padded bands. They were powered by an assortment of isotopic and lithium-gold batteries nesting in his pelvic and pectoral girdles.

Did this fine man look in the least like a walking skeleton? — I demanded of myself outragedly! Well, yes, *very much so*, I had to admit now that I had considered the matter from the viewpoint of strangers. A very handsome and stylish skeleton, all silver and black, but a skeleton none the less and one eight feet eight inches tall, able to look down a little even at the giant Texans around him.

I realized now that my anger and my inability to see myself as others see me had been because Father and Mother had found nothing morbid or eerie about me in my new, silvery anti-grav prosthetic — nor had the Longhairs who had constructed it for me in return for free performances of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *Manhattan Project*, two jam-sessions and one "Dance of the Seven Veils" by Idris McIllwraith, the Sack's perennial sex star, who is a Thin like me and looks like the ancient high-fashion model Teeny (Twilly? Twiggy?) drastically slimmed down, yet has much appeal. I ask her once a month to marry me, but although granting occasional favors, she refuses me always on the silly grounds that she is thrice my age. Who dies in free fall?

I glanced down at my newer love, the sublime La Cucaracha, and she was gazing up at me and my exoskeleton with as fond approval as my parents and with something spicy added. But when I made to bow to her again and perhaps hear more exciting whispers about our coming rendezvous, she twinkle-toed away, drawing from a fancy pack a long, very thin, pale brownish cigarette.

"Scully Christopher Crockett La Cruz," Elmo meanwhile hailed me from where he stood talking with Bill, while still collaring the three dwarfs. Suzy had sat up from her faint and was looking at me with a thin-lipped disapproval, which I connected with the attentions I had showered on La Cucaracha.

"That Crockett's a good Texas handle," Elmo continued. "Deepens my friendship for you, boy. Anyhow, Scully, I been considering your problems. There's a

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northbound cargo jet loading might lift you to Amarillo Cuchillo, but she mayn't take off for a week — we Texans conduct our commerce in a relaxed fashion. So Bill here has agreed to release you into my custody, and you and I are going to pay a little visit on the Governor of Texas, Texas — and what he can't expedite, nobody else can even budge.

"Besides, it ain't every day we get a spaceman. Governor bound to want to hear the gossip about the long-interdicted lands in the sky. Who can tell, they might turn out to be far-flung fragments of Texas.

"Scully, you can't refuse — you're going to experience Texas hospitality if I have to tie you up and have my greasers lug you.

"Now jump for his baggage, you black-hearted little *conquistadores,* or I'll sell you for cyborgs!" He released the three bent-backs, while to my darling he called, "Light me that stick now, Kookie, *pronto,* or I'll return your wardrobe to the theater man for refund, all but one Medieval onion sack."

I hate to be pushed around, especially by big-brotherly shoves, nor did I care for the language Elmo directed at my new nymph, but his proposition seemed the best for me. Especially since I did not intend to leave Dallas before getting my gravity legs and — Eros ensure! — keeping my moon-cued rendezvous. For even now as the little one grasped Elmo's wide belt, nimbly vaulted onto his slightly-bent, huge thigh and hung the smoldering slim cigarette on his long loose lip, she gave a quick conspiratorial smile and eyelash-ripple, telling of impending raptures.

Elmo took a long fluttering inhalation of marijuana vapor, his eyes going first glassy, then feverbright as he called out, "Now forward hop, you greasers all! Come on, Scully, let's skedaddle."

The three dwarfs now each carried a black, silver-banded cushion-case containing chiefly my food concentrates and spare batteries, my winter clothing and wigs. They still snatched fearful glances at me. As I followed Elmo toward the ten-foot door, they marched through the shorter door, each of the three barely missing bumping his head on the lintel, while my brunette darling scampered through behind them, her head held high.

Why their backs were variously bent, and hers not at all, was instantly clear to me.

The enormity of the revelation, plus my hunting for vector-changes in the centrifuge's floor and still not finding them, must have caused me to take short, shuffling steps with my tempor-

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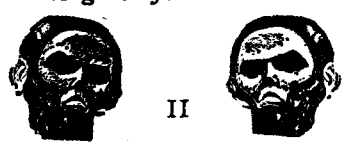
arily kneeless five-foot legs, for Elmo looked back and exclaimed, "Scully son, you're walking like the first time on stilts, or like you got paresis. Maybe our Mexican door sort of startled you. It's one of those charming, deeply-mused Texan customs that make our glorious way of life possible. You see, Scully, a man can't feel really free unless he's got a lot of underfolk to boss around. That's one of the great paradoxes of liberty, first discovered by those proto-Texans, the ancient Greeks, who had slaves to burn, though I don't think they actually burnt them much until Nero's day or maybe till the discovery of gasoline, which permitted deep-south lynching bees and Buddhist immolations alike.

"Incidentally, Scully, I'd appreciate it if you'd button up that cloak of yours and resume your hood. Mexes are superstitious little buggers. Even when cyborged, their odd primitive fears short-circuit through. I got my three boys calmed temporarily — and La Kook's a cool little bitch — but I wouldn't want you causing a riot in Dallas. History proves that the first time a man goes down the streets of Dallas, anything can happen to him, frequently bad."

I complied with his suggestion, but made no verbal retort, contenting myself with giving him a grim look, sucking in my cheeks to increase the skull-like appearance of my head and stepping out after him recklessly.

"A vigorous paresis, I got to admit," he commented.

Ahead of him another pair of doors began to slide open, letting in sunny brightness and flashes of movement; and I braced myself for transition from centrifugal force to gravity.



II

DALLAS, TEXAS, TEXAS

I teetered into blazing sunlight and a huge scene that was whirling around with me twenty times a minute, one full revolution every three seconds for the dozens of Texas giants I now saw, the hundreds of glass-and-metal living volumes, the thousands of rapidly moving Mexicans — most of these with massive metal collars from which rose small antennas — and even the blue sky, the marshmallow clouds and the blinding sun.

The entire universe had become a vast centrifuge, and I one mote spinning near its center, an axis a dozen yards above my head. I staggered and reeled on my stilt-legs, waiting for the sky to burst and the cosmos to rip apart from the incredible centrifugal forces.

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When the scientific, engineering and paramilitary communites of the international mega-satellite Circumluna were ordered to carry World War 3 into space, they refused, relying on their charters from the United Nations. In desperation and reprisal, the warring powers below repudiated the United Nations, clapped embargoes on all shipments of food, fuels, metals, medicines and other supplies to Circumluna and outlawed their rebellious nationals there. The Circumlunans, who effectually controlled the space fleets and were on the verge of achieving a self-sufficient economy based on raw materials from the Moon, declared their independence. This action of "the Longhairs" was enthusiastically received by the even longer-haired space-vagabonds—originally hippies, beatniks, mods, dropouts, stilyagi, actors, writers, pachukos, apaches, gypsies and other quaintly styled rebels—parasitic on (or symbiotic with; accounts differ) the respectable Circumlunans and living in their hive of duraplastic bubble homes pendant on Circumluna and known as the Sack. For five generations there was no commerce and little communication between Terra and Circumluna, due to the latter's focus on survival and to the cultural upheavals and impoverished economy below after World War 3 killed its billion and fizzled out. When the Interdict, as it came to be called, was lifted one hundred years later, the first Circumlunans and "Sackabonds" to plumb the gravity well and visit Earth were a surprise to its inhabitants, but the centuries-alienated spacefolk found Terra a still greater shock.

—*Mother Earth, Father Space: A Short History of Circumluna*, by John Washington and Ivan Alapin

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Then I realized my error, and the scene stopped spinning with a suddenness that almost knocked me down.

What I had been interpreting as centrifugal force back in the room muraled with Indians and Texans had been only normal Earth gravity.

I learned in that instant that you can endlessly *explain* to a person who's lived all his life in free fall that human senses cannot distinguish between the effects of acceleration, with which he's familiar, and gravity, of which he's had no experience. You can *tell* him that until your voice fails. No matter, he'll still go on believing that gravity will *feel* different, that it will grab him with invisible gluey fingers, that it will have in it the taint of unimaginable cubic miles of soil, rock, magma, incandescent core-material, and other dirty planetary horrors.

I no sooner had been experience-educated out of one illusion than I became the victim of another: I felt I had returned to airless space.

When a man who has lived all his life in a null-grav satellite, a large but limited homeland of many rooms, steps outdoors for the first time on a planet, one of his strongest immediate reactions is to hold his breath. Not from wonder and amazement, though they are there, but because the only comparable situation he knows is that of a man plunged into the vastness of space without an air supply. Ignoring the ground under his feet and the gravs pressing him to it, he will automatically see the unbounded sky as vacuum and any building around him as pressurized volumes to which he must win his way in seconds, or die. I held my breath.

But I did not run, or — the actual impulse, to follow which would have resulted in my barking my nose on Texas — launch myself in an intended straight-line trajectory at the nearest window or door. Perhaps my first bit of experience-education made the second come quicker. Though still staggering about, I exhaled violently and forced myself to draw a lungful of the soupy air, stinkier now that we were outside. Besides discovering that I was in anything but vacuum, I also realized the explanation for my deep voice. All my life, even in the *Tsiolkovsky*, I had been breathing a light oxygen-helium mix with small amounts of carbon dioxide and water vapor. Now I was subsisting on a thick witch's brew of the same oxygen, but stewed in gravity's pressure-cooker with nitrogen and assorted taints. A heavier atmosphere, a deeper voice. As obvious as that — but only after it's happened to you.

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I looked around and down, to see that under La Cucaracha's directions Elmo's three servants had dropped my bags and were circling me as I reeled, ready to break my fall when I finally toppled.

Elmo called back cheerily, "You drunk, partner? Didn't know the super-refreshing open air of Texas was *that* intoxicating to the uninitiated. I forget you're a Sackabond, reared on a little denatured oxygen and perfume."

As I steadied myself, a whole gaggle of new little Mexicans came scurrying all around me, a couple of the tiniest ones even tugging at my cloak, and most of them calling up to me, "*Benediga nosotros, padre!*" They were a raggedy, colorful lot, chiefly women and children, and none of them, praise Diana, wore those disgusting metal neck-and-shoulder pieces.

I'm enough of an actor to ad-lib any role I'm thrust into, so I stuck two fingers out of my cloak, made a squiggle with them, and rumbled benignly, "*Benedicite, mis ninos y ninas,*" adding for good measure, "Bless you, my children."

It seemed natural enough for them to mistake me with my robe and hood for a tall priest or monk, maybe a Black Franciscan.

My ready response to their request seemed to satisfy them fully, for they were already scampering off when Elmo boomed, "Get away from the God-man before you trip him with your rosaries, you church-struck little greasers! Scully, you're a card, but we got to make tracks for the Governor's ranch house. Are you over your dizziness enough to ride a horse?"

I was about to respond, "Yes, of course. You think I'm a sissy, *hombre?*" when a feeling of dizziness and weakness did strike me. A steady six lunagravs and assorted startlements had been getting in their licks on my somewhat delicate physiology. My heart was pounding as it pumped blood to my brain — no small job, considering my height and the gravs. I also was glad I was wearing an extra-snug Sack-suit, to help my leg veins from going varicose and maybe even popping as they pushed blood up that weary distance from my toes.

I tongued pep, instant-glucose and antigrav pills out of their cheek-plate container into my mouth. Even the tiny dissolving pellets seemed heavy as osmium on my tongue, and they dropped down my throat like bullets. I followed them with a sip of truly heavy water from my other cheek plate, tilting my exo-skulled head to do so. They quickly helped. La Cucaracha beamed up at me her congratulations, as if she already

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knew my inner feelings as well as I did.

By that time, however, Elmo had a twenty-foot whip uncoiled and was cracking it over a low narrow vehicle somewhat longer than I was.

It bounced along on two caterpillar treads moved by ten wheels. The wheels fascinated me. Except in pictures or employed as pulleys, one never sees wheels in Circumluna, where there is no gravity to put teeth in friction.

Off the vehicle were scrambling a couple of dozen Mexicans, including some of those who had received my benediction, while Elmo was shouting relaxedly, "Get off that cat-wagon, *pronto,* you fun-loving, irresponsible little monkeys! The Black Pope here needs it. I'll see it gets back to your patron." Then to me he said, "Climb aboard, Scully, and stretch out your weary exoskeleton. Ordinarily we don't let Mexes use power cars, but a cat-wagon's no more than a toy. However, it's just what the metallurgical osteopath ordered for you. I can tell you're too frazzled to mount a steed yet and, come to think of it, I don't suppose they have too many cayuses in Circumluna, and those pretty spiritless."

Oddly, he was right about that. CL did have a few horses for old-style serum factories and on the Noah's Ark principle.

I started to tell him I was splendidly unfrazzled and eager to learn the art of horsemanship, but my heart was still pounding a bit, so I decided to conserve energy and keep my attention free for the weird sights around me. I did another of my stiff-kneed bows, braced my hands on an end of the cat-wagon, transferred my feet to the other end, let myself down on my face and then rolled over with a minimum of exoskeletal clankings.

My heart quieted now that my circulatory system wasn't fighting gravity as hard. I felt better, except that I couldn't see much besides the sky. I raised my head and scanned.

Elmo had coiled his whip and was hooking it to his silver-studded leather belt, which also supported two lightning pistols. Otherwise he was dressed in what I took to be a conservative Terran business suit, complete with cuffs, buttons, lapel, collar and great sky-colored tie depicting bluebonnet flowers; but on his feet were huge, high-heeled leather boots, and on his head a six-(twelve? factorial four?)-gallon hat.

He was astride a horse as huge, relatively, as he was. I marveled at the bone- and muscle-power of both — his to mount and the beast's to carry. In fact, for a moment I toyed with the notion

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that he had an exoskeleton under his suit, and the animal a surgically implanted steel one.

He noted my gaze and said, "Yep, Scully, we feed our mounts the hormone too. Next to Texans, they're God's noblest creation. And now you might punch the cat-wagon's first go-button at your elbow. The lever next it steers her."

I complied, and our small cavalcade started off at a pace brisk to me, a novice driver. Elmo merely walked his horse ahead of us, but its strides were long and smooth. Just behind him La Cucaracha jounced on a burrow — now I understood those disproportionate murals better. My darling rode side-saddle and regaled me with frequent smiles over-shoulder, while to the rear Elmo's three Mexicans jogged with my bags. There was a disproportion I could correct.

"*Senor* Elmo," I called, "tell your boys to throw my bags on the wagon and hop aboard themselves. There'll be no overload — despite my metal, I mass low."

"That's out, Scully," he boomed back. "Can't have greasers riding with anything Texas-tall, no mind how skinny or strange. Myself, I been around and tolerate indecencies, but 'twould shock Dallasians spitless."

"I want the bags for pillows," I explained, "so I can study Dallasian salivation, *et cetera*, besides scan the road."

"Then that's okay. But the other's out. Peel your eyes, partner. You got a lot more to see than Texas Adam's apples bobbing. Hey, you greasers, comfort my guest's cerebrum with his luggage!"

I was inclined to argue longer with him about them riding, but the three Mexicans gave me such apprehensive glances as they trembling-handed tucked my bags in a soft stack under my head and seemed so eager to return to their rear-guard position, that I decided to postpone any equalitarian lecture. However, the frightened behavior of the three nagged at me.

There was indeed much to see, most of it crazy to me, like a 3D motion-montage with volumes moving at different camera speeds, and most of it jammed into a single plane — truly Terra is flatland. First there were the buildings, like cubical satellites crowded in disordered ranks, some many rooms long — no, high — on end — and made of metal and glass, reminding me of Circumluna. Between these went occasional gangways — streets — on one of which we traveled. Then there were the Texans, some on horses, others in slowly moving vehicles, others strolling afoot.

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The younger seemed even taller than the older — I wondered if the hormone had a cumulative effect.

Moving about thrice as fast and in numbers a decimal order greater were the Mexicans, all of identical bent-back height and almost all afoot. About sixty percent wore the metal collars and antennas, and these were all furiously busy at various construction and deconstruction jobs — half of our street was torn up, buildings were being dismantled, others assembled, great masts reared, great holes dug. I even thought at first the collared workers could walk up walls — no strange sight to a space-dweller — until I noted that those on vertical surfaces were supported by slim wires, which they swiftly climbed or down-climbed.

One might wonder at my being able to see so much while maneuvering a strange vehicle for the first time in a gravity field. But if one has a lifetime of experience moving in three dimensions, moving in two is child's play. I was soon driving the cat-wagon with such easy competence that I was able to spare a hand to work at my balky knee-motor and had it adjusted in a matter of seconds. I surely had been woozy on my first try!

I soon observed that I was attracting interest. The Texans' faces never turned toward me, but their eyeballs did, and they slowed down in passing. The collarless Mexicans goggled me frankly, but speeded up, making wide curves around our cavalcade. The collared ones, however, marched by with never a glance, like so many tiny, swift juggernauts, fortunately people-avoiding ones.

The speed of all the bent-backs surprised me. Father had told me all about Mexicans. A strict indoctrination in racial and national behavior had come very early in my education, because it is very important in the theater. Father had assured me that all Mexicans were short and wore serapes and big hats, went barefoot and spent their lives sitting against adobe walls, smoking hemp and sleeping, except for brief periods of firing off pistols.

These Mexicans were not at all like that, except for the short and barefoot parts.

In fact, there were many types. Just now some wee Mexican children, cute as dark kittens, came toddling up and scattered flowers over me, most likely thinking me a corpse bound for the boneyard, for when I lifted and turned my head to look at them, they ran away.

La Cucaracha had slowed her burro until she was jogging beside me. She observed, "Legends, or lies, from the black lands tell

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that flower power was once a great thing. But here at least it has died out."

Noting my special interest in the collared Mexicans, she explained disdainfully, "They are cyborgs, the *estupidos*. Their collars feed them orders and happiness — straight into their veins and nerves. From a distance foremen control them — after a fashion." She added the last phrase when two files of cyborgs collided and instantly began a confused milling aimed at eventual disentanglement, like ants I had once watched in a flatland between glass.

"They live like this forever?" I asked with some horror.

"Ah no," she assured me, "only during the working day. The other ten hours they exist as men, employing what fragments of pounded-adobe spirit they have left. Chiefly they feed, fornicate and sleep. My countrymen!"

I recalled what had been nagging me. "*Senorita* K," I asked, "why is it that your countrymen regard me with a fear that is both more and less than fear? Explain that to me, if you will, *mi amada bonita*."

With a rapid frown and fingershake, she leaned down and whispered warningly, "No tendernesses until moonrise, as I first commanded you, you tall incompetent and undisciplined!" Then in an equally low, but most cool voice, she continued, "*Senor* La Cruz, my people are like children. They live by fairy tales, some sweet as sugar, some grisly as red bone. One of the latter tells of Death, tall as the sky who will one day come striding across Texas. He will have the form of a great skeleton — *El Esqueleto*, he's named oftenest. He will be tossing like *fritos* into his great naked jaws and grinding there human skulls — made of sugar-candy, some say, of fresh-torn bloody bone and brains, say others. My people will flock to him. He will give them never a glance, any more than stars and clouds look down at men, but he will lead them to freedom."

I had become so engrossed in her small but colorful tale that I almost started when a large voice inquired, "Kookie been feeding you a sob story about cyborgs?" Elmo had gradually let his own mount drift backwards until he too was beside me, on the opposite side of the wagon. "Don't you believe a single word that comes out of her cute, lying, little postage-stamp lips. Scully, my pal, cyborgs live a lot happier than Texans. Their joy comes each day sure as Coca-Cola. Besides, they're essential to our liberty and freedom, as I've explained."

"Myself, I think they would all

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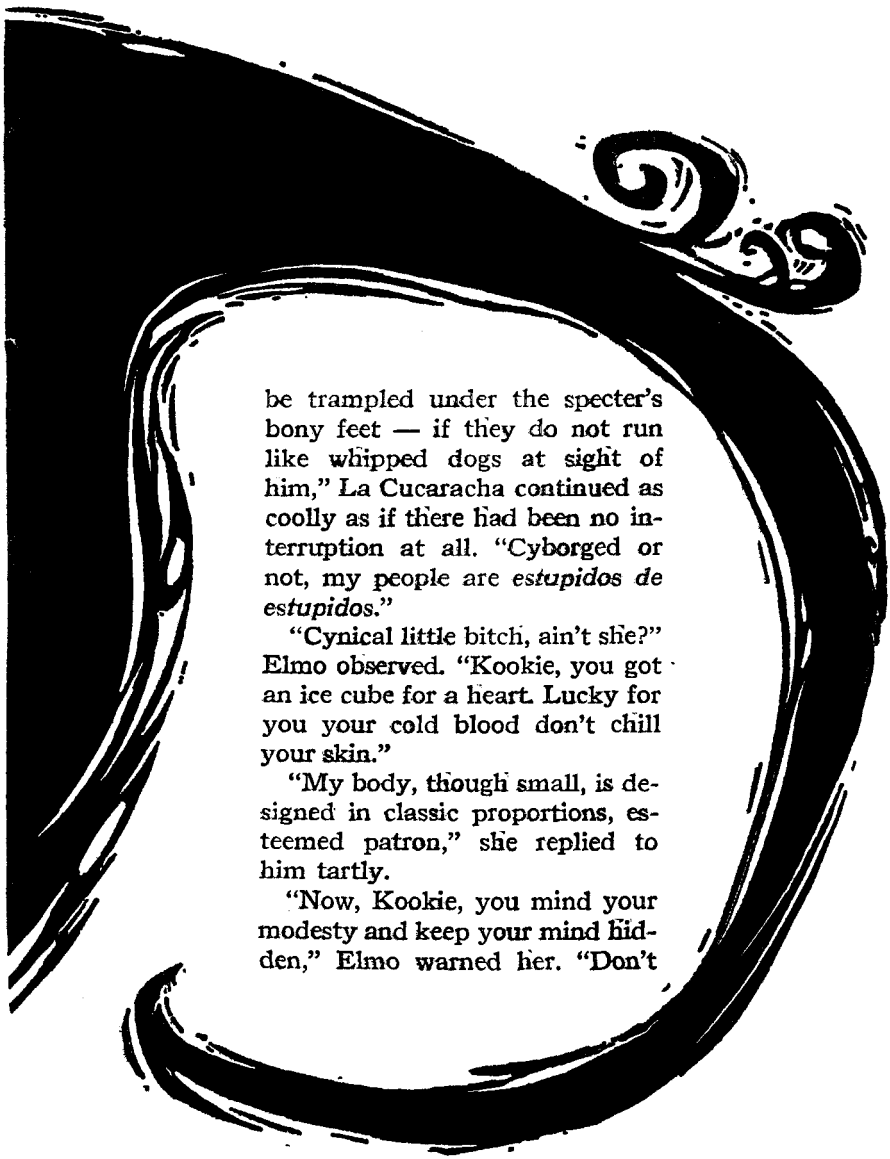

be trampled under the specter's bony feet — if they do not run like whipped dogs at sight of him," La Cucaracha continued as coolly as if there had been no interruption at all. "Cyborged or not, my people are *estupidos de estupidos*."

"Cynical little bitch, ain't she?" Elmo observed. "Kookie, you got an ice cube for a heart. Lucky for you your cold blood don't chill your skin."

"My body, though small, is designed in classic proportions, esteemed patron," she replied to him tartly.

"Now, Kookie, you mind your modesty and keep your mind hidden," Elmo warned her. "Don't

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you go starting an intellectual striptease front of me and my guest. T'other kind's the only one a woman's fitted for, greaser or gringo."

"You wish me to mop and mow like a madwoman, master? Or grunt to Senor La Cruz, *no sabe?* Or discard my clothing perhaps?"

"Now, Kookie, I'm telling you that if you don't behave, I'll —"

The altercation might have become unpleasant, except that at that moment I involuntarily interrupted it. We were approaching a gold or gilded statue twenty feet high of a most muscular man in barbarian garb. From his helmet thrust very long and twisting horns. His right hand swung back a battleaxe, his left pointed a six-shooter.

"Who is *that?*" I demanded, pointing with a black-shrouded leg, because I was riding feet first and my hands were busy driving. "I did not know that Terra had regressed to full barbarianism during the Interdict."

"Scully, ain't you familiar with the discoverer of Texas, even, and its first decent-size *hombre?*" Elmo retorted in genially scandalized tones. "You mean to tell me you ain't ever heard of Leif Ericson, Paul Bunyan, Big Bill Thomson, John L. Sullivan, William Randolph Hearst, Abraham Lincoln and such other great Texans?"

"No," I admitted, "though I have heard of Sam Houston, Jim Bowie and my namesake Davy Crockett."

"Oh, yeah, they were Texans too," he admitted, "though on a more local plane, San Jacinto and Alamo boys. And old Raven Sam, though one of our early prexies, was pretty dubious in some ways — Indian lover and Yankee fellow-traveler, it's said."

I thought of asking him about Julius Caesar and Jesus Christ, but refrained for fear of having an attack of history-epilepsy. I might learn that they too had been Texans.

Instead, I said, steering the catwagon around Leif Ericson, "I recognized some of the others you named, but thought them men of the United States and Canada."

La Cucaracha had jogged ahead again, though not without giving me a quick lip-pursed smile and eyelash ripple. Elmo leaned out of his saddle toward me and said, "Scully, I can see your heavenly instructors knew only the superficial version of Earth's history, the one pap-fed to the general public. Since you're going to be meeting some mighty sophisticated and influential men today, it's best you know a scrap or two of the truth. *Amigo mio,* the Lone Star Republic never *was* one of

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the United States. In 1845 she assumed *leadership* of them, because she could see they needed bolstering against foreign aggression and internal disorder; and that was a most accurate foresight, because she had to spend the next three years throwing back the attack of Mexico on them. And pretty soon she had the Civil War to run — both sides.

"Of course it was given out to the general public of the states, who never had no brains or guts nohow and flustered easy, that this assumption of leadership was annexation — but it was always known to the speaker of the House and the senators who counted in Washington that by secretest treaty Texas was boss. Thereafter the Presidents in the White House were just figureheads for the Texas Estabishment — Franklin D. Roosevelt, for instance, was the puppet of our Jack Garner, a mighty modest kingpin, just as later on Lyndon the Great bossed Jack Kennedy, though the latter was posthumously declared an honorary Texan and president thereof because of the grandeur and ritual importance of his demise. With the coming of the Third World War and the atomization of Washington, New York, San Francisco and so forth, secrecy became unnecessary, and Texas took over in name as well as substance, including for good measure the frosty top and hot, dry, jungly bottom of the continent. We needed more greasers, anyhow, for therapeutic reasons."

My mind was tossing like the cat-wagon, which was traversing a curving section of the street under repair and trying to dodge Mexicans who were simultaneously dodging me. I wished now I had had other history instructors besides my father, who would dispose of the conquest of a continent with an offhand "Enter barbarians with battleaxes," or of a civilization with "Exit voluptuaries, wringing hands and screaming. Idris does quick naked dive-across." I knew quite a bit of Greek, Roman and English dynastic history and the neurotic antics of Twentieth-Century man from Ibsen and Bergman to Green Comedy and Inner-Space Multistage; but our repertoire had no late plays set in Texas, so father had brushed past that land quickly. Oh, before my down-orbit he'd briefed me on the Northwest Territory and Yellowknife minutely and with great accuracy — I'd *thought* (now I was not so sure).

"Well, I've had my say, and it's your turn to talk, Scully," Elmo interrupted. "You were saying something back there about the Yellowknife Registry of Min-

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ing Claims?" His voice was suddenly so casual and his memory so precise that for no other reasons I found myself getting suspicious. But once again I was given opportunity to change the topic by a golden sculpture, this one abstract.

Beside the street, about twenty meters up, hung a golden rectangle, across the lower side of which was affixed, pointing acutely downward, what looked like a distance-weapon of some sort, all golden too. It was a few moments before I saw the slim, transparent pylon supporting this part of the abstraction, so near was the pylon's substance to being invisible.

The distance-weapon pointed at the other half of the abstraction, a most complex structure of pipes, wires, rods, springs and boxes, all golden too, about as long as my cat-wagon but wider and thicker. This fantastic brick of golden tracery was also supported by the near invisible substance, but at a height of only half a meter.

Pointing, Elmo explained, "There's the window in the book depository from which Oswald fired the fatal shots, and that's the chassis of the car in which Jack got gunned down, providing by that one brave act of his an example to all future presidents of Texas to go their way courageously when their political bell tolled.

"Incidentally, Scully —" he continued, leaning a little lower in his saddle and pitching his voice likewise, "what I'm going to tell you *now* is pretty high-security stuff, but the menfolk where we're going have got nothing whatever else in their skulls — deep waters, Scully, deep waters — so it's only fair I give you a paddle or two to navigate with, and maybe an aqualung. And besides, we Texans don't care much for security; we like things loose as the reins by which we herd our second-class citizenry. Anyhow, what I was going to tell you is this: Our current president of Texas is fledging a bit when it comes to following Jack's great example. He's disliked, you see, but instead of standing forth and dying like a man, he's turned the President's Manse into a fort and — believe it and weep! — he's organized a corps of Mexican houseboys faithful to his person, and he's armed them! With laser guns at that! Which ain't playing fair at all to the political opposition. Why, he's even kicked out his Texas-Ranger guards. Says he can't trust them not to kill him — which is true, of course, but uncouth to mention."

"It's him we're going to visit now?"

"No, you got it all wrong, Scully, though his Manse is here in Dallas, where all important things

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are. We're going to visit the Ranch of Cotton Bowie Lamar, governor of Texas, Texas — that is, governor of the father state in the world's greatest nation. We're not going to have anything to do at all with that dastardly, Mexican-arming tyrant Longhorn Elijah Austin, current bossman of that same greatest nation, though it pains me to say so."

"You hope to defeat him at the next election?" I asked.

Elmo shook his head and sucked his lips with a plop. "Nope, Scully, in achieving real freedom we've long ago discarded the phantasms of democracy. For the immaterial, ignoble ballot we've resubstituted the material, ritually preferable, noble bullet — which is the item Longhorn E. A. most contumeliously refuses to face. Adverse ballots he'd let cascade off him like cottonwood balls."

Meanwhile the wheels of the cat-wagon, the hooves of the burro and hormoned horse and the trotting six horny soles of the Mexicans' feet were carrying us past a most interestingly different expanse. All metal, glass, and plastic were gone. In the distance was a veritable forest of tiny hutments bowered and lined by bursts of bright color — flowers, it occurred to me with pleased surprise. Between them and our street was a crowded city of pastel homes — pale violet, blue, and pink — but too tiny even for Mexicans. Then I realized that this was a graveyard.

Between the palely colorful homes of the dead was hobbling toward us, helped by a long staff, a figure robed like myself, but in yellow and orange and about five feet tall, while his hood held only blackness. My exoskeleton suddenly felt cold to my sack-suited skin. I stopped the cat-wagon and sat up.

"Greasertown," Elmo explained succinctly.

With an effort I forced my eyes to scan away from the figure which disturbingly held them. Ahead, bordered on two sides by the cemetery and on one by our street and backed by a structure of pastel arches I took for a church, was an even more colorful metal construction consisting of a large, round, empty floor ten feet off the ground, approached by several stairways and shaded by a rippling canopy supported by slim rainbow pillars ten meters tall.

A quick nod from La Cucaracha told me that my first thought was correct — it was the bandstand of our evening assignation.

But the romantic leaping in me was chilled as my gaze returned to the advancing robed one. I still could not discern a face in-

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side the hood. I asked myself if it were only the bright sunshine making shadows blacker, or if —"

"Here comes one of them consarned nigra Zen Buddhists from one of them consarned tidewater anarchies — California most like, which has been predominately black ever since the assassination of Ronald the Third," Elmo observed. "Although their Zens are troublesome little locos, forever ranting and mooching and setting themselves afire, we let them wander freely through Texas out of the greatness of our tolerance and —" his voice dropped — "for diplomatic reasons."

Now I could see the slit-eyed, anger-contorted, almost inky-black face inside the hood. Because of intermarriage, such extreme skin colors have vanished from the Sack and even Circumluna.

Some of my apprehension disappeared, but only some.

He stopped two meters from me. Now that he limped no longer, but stood only, he gained a foot in height, or seemed to. His eyelids flew open wide, disclosing great orbs of madness, like bloodshot moons. An unseen power emanated from him and gripped me.

"O white dirt from the sky!" he cried gratingly at me. "Arise and shoulder your Karma."

I nervously cleared my throat.

Grasping his staff two-handed by one end, he brought it straight down on my head before I could think to defend myself.

My titanium head-basket rang with a muffled but sonorous *bong!* I wasn't hurt, but I was jarred, numbed and startled.

"Arise, I command you! — you miserable construct of flesh and metal, you abominable offspring of ofay and engine," he growled on. "Arise and accept the Great Destiny of which you are totally unworthy!" And he swung back his staff for another bash. I felt powerless to defend myself.

La Cucaracha was kicking her burro toward him, but it was Elmo's whip that took him around the shoulders. There was a crackle and a faint bluish flash, and then he was writhing on his back in the dirt, shaking his fists and gurgling unintelligible words, presumably of anger.

With a most expert flick of the same whip, Elmo wound its tip around the staff, flipped it toward himself, caught it in a hamlike hand and pitched it javelinwise far into the graveyard. Then the whip returned to strike sparks from the ground near the twisting figure.

"Vamoose, you nameless son of Nirvana, or I declare I'll grill you before you can get out your gasoline to do it yourself!" he roared.

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The Buddhist scrambled to his feet and hobbled off through the gravestones with great shoulder-bobbings, using a fisted stiff arm for staff, but looking back across his sullied robes to glare and curse, or so it sounded.

"What was *he* talking about?" I asked in a voice driven by anxiety almost baritone-high.

Elmo shrugged. "Oh, those hash-blasted Zens always talk that way. With them, destinies and karmas and 'carnations are a penny a peck. Trouble is, they're always banging people over the skull — to emphasize their senseless statements, *they* say. Lucky you got that half-helmet, Scully. I'd run the maniac in, except we don't want to waste no time."

"A black bee-bonnet, Senor La Cruz," my darling chimed in. "Filth beneath your feet. Think no more of him."

"But how did he know I was from space?"

Once more Elmo shrugged, screwing up his big face like a giant pepper. "Those nigras got odd ways of knowing things, now and again," he admitted.

"He also knew, despite my cloak and hood, that I combined metal and flesh."

"That's true. Maybe there's something here needs watching. Kookie, you take Gonzales and Company and find out what that black bugger's up to. But don't nervous him. He really might set himself afire, though he's black as a cinder already. Then report home."

"Ah ha, I knew it would come!" my dear one cried, her dark eyes snapping with anger, real or assumed. "I knew you would once again find an excuse not to take me to the Governor's Ranch. Is it that you fear my boldness will embarrass you?"

"Now, Kookie — "

"Or is it that you are afraid one of higher rank will demand me of you on a trade, and you lack spirit to refuse?"

"Kookie! You hop it now without no back talk, or I swear I'll ante you up first hand of my next poker game."

"Agreed! And they will have to send to the girl-shops of Ciudad Mexico or New Orleans at least to match your bet. Pedro, Pablo, Pablito! *Vamanos!*"

As she spun her burro toward the graveyard, the three bent-backs trotting behind her, she spared me one more eye-flash, and with three fingers she pitter-patted the pleasing bump on the left side of her chest, to indicate the feelings of the organ beneath.

Elmo said to me, "Scully, time's a-wasting. You must have got the hang of that cat-wagon by now, so let's press a bit." And with that he removed his immense

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hat, swung it twice in a circle, cried, "Ki-yi-yipee!" and heeled his mount into a gallop.

Gritting my teeth, which I do with great power, I thumbed the last go-button at my elbow and sped after him, bouncing about a bit on my flatbed. As we raced by the bandstand neck-and-neck, the depression that had gripped me from first sight of the orange-yellow monk now lifted entirely. My spirits soared. I would fulfill my mission on Terra, yes! — but with even greater certainty, memorizing the route from now on, I would return to the romantically hued cemetery tonight at moonrise, even if I had to adapt jets to my exoskeleton and compute for the first time a gravity-atmosphere parabola!

A few brown-robed figures poured from the church as we passed it. Perhaps they thought my vehicle was a runaway hearse, complete with shrouded corpse, and so their responsibility, since it fell within their traditional area of birth and baptism, confirmation, marriage, mortal illness and death. But we soon outdistanced them.

III

GOVERNOR'S RANCH

My exoskeleton responding to its myoelectric orders with purring efficiency, I speeded up at the last instant and entered the state-patio of the Governor's ranch Beau Astonishment a long stride ahead of Elmo and the scuttling bent-back houseboys in violet kneepants and lace-trimmed, violet jackets, but barefoot as Gonzales and Company. These came in two converging clusters through the greaser doors closely flanking the gringo door.

Then I stopped dead, standing perfectly erect, and let them all pile up clumsily behind me. I had learned how to steal an entrance before I ever played Tom Sawyer, Odd John, Jommy Cross, or Little Lord Fauntleroy.

As Elmo began my introduction in suddenly subdued and almost faltering tones with a "Governor Cotton Bowie Lamar, your honor . . . and gentlemen . . . *other* gentlemen," I ceased listening carefully to him and rapidly scanned the scene without moving an exoskeletal link.

I was in a spacious area roofed by the sky, walled on three sides by metal walls four stories high and of many colors, and flag-toned by an even more rainbow jigsaw puzzle of polished minerals, marbles perhaps from many quarries, most of the pieces mosaic-small. In the flat distance were a few trees and many slender towers in the form of truncated cones. Two of these were five

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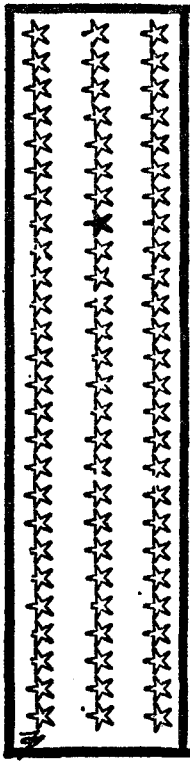
Texas is a serene superstate stretching from the Equator to Siberia. Bordered by the trivial tumultuous black anarchies of the seaweed regions, he inspires and tolerantly dominates the top half of the New World, of the vast ranges of which he occupies 99.9 percent, an area greater than that of the King Ranch.

—*Lone Star Continent*, by Sam Houston Lipinsky, University of Texas at Minneapolis Press



Lamar, Mirabeau Buonaparte, 1798-1859, first vice president (1836-38) and second president (1838-41) of Texas, a poetry-writing, history-bemused, personally charming Georgia newspaper editor, who arrived in Texas sword in hand, inquired his way to Sam Houston's little army, and became one of the heroes of the battle of San Jacinto, April 21, 1836, where he commanded the cavalry. As president he ousted the Cherokees and Comanches from the infant nation (although Houston was a blood-member of the former tribe), secured Texas' recognition by Britain, France, the Lowlands and the German States, guided her through the Pig War of 1840, created the piratical Texas Navy, set aside vast leagues of land for educational and cultural purposes, achieved for the Lone Star Republic even vaster, credit-building debts, and also conceived the goal of Big Texas, foreshadowing Lyndon Johnson's Great Society.

—Thumbnail Texans

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times the height of the rest, wider in proportion and they looked much newer. They all cast long, late afternoon shadows.

Beginning in the middle distance and ending twenty meters away, was a vast rippling rectangle reflecting the sky's blue. If it were water, there was, I decided, enough for a lake — far more even than in Circumluna's largest swimming-volume. From a platform next to it a large, long board extended, which made me think of pirate tales of "walking the plank."

But perhaps it was petroleum, I reminded myself, unrolling from my memory a map of Terra's resources, where areas rich in fossil animal fats were colored blue.

Nearer at hand, each occupying his own many-pillowed couchlike structure with low tables on either side, were a half dozen male Texans more elegantly or at least more neatly clad than Elmo and all with noble craggy faces; it was as if I had walked into a quality western, circa 1950. (Circumluna's and the Sack's microfilmed and taped records of Earth's arts are said to be better than those of Terra herself.) Like Elmo's, their legs were the heaviest part of them — it takes great columns indeed to support in six lunagravs the mass matching an eight-foot height. Their gleamingly polished boots were vast.

All held or had beside them glasses of amber fluid, while most puffed long reefers — there was a scent like plastics under heat-treatment. Bent-backs scampered about noiselessly, serving and erranding.

All the recumbent ones radiated an aura of power even greater than that of physical elegance, and all had one or more of the behavioral quirks which traditionally go with power's possession. The nearest held in one half-closed hand a stack of gleamingly yellow rounds and clinked them in waltz time.

Another of them had inserted three fingers under his gleaming white shirt and with them was scratching his solar plexus in another rhythm. A crop-haired one had a seven-second facial tic which with each convulsion threatened to dislodge, but never quite did, the large monocle occupying his left orbit. Yet, as I say, all had matinee-idol profiles, circa 1900.

I noted with approval that as they listened to Elmo, their gaze was on me.

Elmo wound up with ". . . and he has large mining interests in North Texas," which irked me considerably. The guesser and loose-mouth! (Yet it was truly I who had first been waggy-tongued when coming out of sedation.)

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Without the least flourish I removed my hooded cloak and dropped it on the nearest houseboy. It covered him totally, but I did not pause to note how he handled this problem.

With the least bow, I slowly rotated my face like a panoramic camera from one end of the recumbent group to the other, meanwhile saying in my lowest audible voice, resonant with nerve-gripping subsonics. "Most potent, grave, and reverend signors, my very noble and approved good masters, I come to you bearing greetings from the outside universe."

(Father had always advised me about vanity-mad humans, which includes the entire species, terrestrial and spatial — even I have touches of conceit — "Lay the flattery on with a trowel, Christopher, and never hesitate to borrow from the Bard. He was himself the Prince of Borrowers.")

I could tell that my deep voice and slim, soldierly bearing impressed them. Sure stage-sense had led me to use the lines of Venice's great captain, Othello.

Next I turned and bowed a trifle more — but only a trifle — to the man who Elmo had first addressed.

"Governor Lamar, your excellency," I said, "I bring you the especial salutations of Circumluna and the Bubbles Congeries." (Sack seemed to lack sufficient dignity in this situation.) And then I eyed him commandingly.

Almost as if hypnotized (Who knows my full powers? — not I), the Governor slowly got to his feet, meanwhile abstractedly picking from his dark coat two bits of invisible lint — that was *his* idiosyncrasy. He was the slenderest of the lot — which isn't saying a great deal — and by a shade the most distinguished looking.

"Mister La Cruz," he said, "I'm grieved at the inconvenience your ill-informed pilot caused you — perhaps he understandably assumed Dallas the port of space entry for all points in our vast nation — but I'm pleased at the opportunity of welcoming you to Texas, Texas. We see few space dwellers, sir, and —" He broke off to capture between finger and thumb something unseen on his left elbow.

"And I, sir," chimed in the clinker of gold pieces, copying Lamar in rising, "as Atoms Bill Burleson, mayor thereof, welcome you to Dallas." His gray-eyed gaze wandered up and down me. "Pardon me, sir, I mean no offense, but I've never seen a man slender as — no, pardon me further, *emaciated* as yourself and still in the land of the living. We've heard of the terrible tortures practiced by the intellectuality-drunken autocrats of Cir-

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cumluna, from whose tyranny I assume you're in flight, but I never guessed that simple starvation continued for years, nay, surely decades —"

I silenced him with a lifted hand and intoned, "Given energy and mass, even of the slightest, to manipulate, man can survive in any environment, including *internal* ones. Only a minimum of muscle and fat is required in sol-heated nullgrav or free fall. We become Thin or Fats, or maintain large muscles by non-grav exercises, as suits our temperaments — asthenic, pyknic, or athletic. I, myself, sir, am fairly clearly a Thin. But I do not understand the mention of tyranny. Circumluna and the Bubbles Congeries are a technocratic democracy."

"Another of the power-men asked me, this one without getting up, "We've always understood that Circum and the Sack were inhabited solely by Longhairs. Now I'm a plain speaker. Are you one of those, Mister La Cruz?"

This one was the burliest and the most burly-legged of the lot, and *his* eccentricity was squeezing lengthwise between thumb and forefinger a black column which lengthened to two decimeters or shortened to nothing without changing diameter — an odd toy, but I had his question to reply to.

"Let my shaven pate be your answer, Mister —?" I saw no point in mentioning the shoulder-length blond wig in my baggage. I eyed him commandingly, but with him it didn't work, at least he didn't rise.

Another of the non-risers broke in, the stomach-scratcher, with whom Elmo, I now noted, had been talking privately. "I gather you got mining investments in North Texas," he said, continuing to scratch, "but who are you with, stranger?"

"I am with myself," I instantly replied with a shrug. "And to be sure, I am with Mister Earp there, who most kindly befriended me at the spaceport."

"That's right, that's right," Elmo put in hastily and also defensively. "That's the truth, simple as put-and-take poker."

I glared at him. He only stared back injuredly, but Lamar at least comprehended the meaning of my look.

"I'm sure that none of us intended to question Mister La Cruz's word," he said soberly. "By the by, I should have introduced —" But he broke off to flick suspiciously and several times with the backs of his fingernails at an apparently spotless area of his knife-pleated trousers.

"As for those mining investments," I seized the chance to say, "I have none. Mr. Earp misinterpreted one of my remarks. The

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matter I have to settle in Amarillo Cuchillo is purely an old family affair."

"Of honor?" Lamar resumed softly, a gleam coming into his eyes and also into those of the gold-chinking Burleson. But before I could answer, the Scratcher again broke in loudly.

"And you mistook one of my meanings, stranger. When I asked you who you was with, I didn't mean who you had around you, or anything complicated like that. I just meant *who are you with?*"

"I do not think I understand you," I said courteously. "When? Where?"

"Anywhere. Any time. But especially now. Who are you with?"

I looked around somewhat helplessly, yet with a bravely jesting small smile calculated to win the sympathy of any audience. "Is it a riddle, gentlemen?" I asked at last.

"It's no riddle, and you're just making it more complicated," the Scratcher retorted almost angrily. Then he seemed to take himself in hand, and with such patience as one might bestow on a weak-witted child, he said, "Look, I'm asking it this way — like, before I became Sheriff of Dallas County, I was with Littleton and Lamar Lightning, and before that I was with Hunt Espionostics and so on. Every male Texan who amounts to anything is with some company, unless he's a public official, in which case he's with the government."

"I comprehend," I said. "I am with — indeed, a featured player with — the La Cruz Theater-in-the-Sphere Stock Company."

"A thespian!" Lamar began warmly. "My daughter will be —"

"*Stock* company!" Burleson exclaimed at the same time, chinking his gold like the wild clash of cymbals. "Mean to say you issue shares, debentures, and —"

"*La Cruz* Company!" exclaimed the one with the black cylinder. "You *own* this business? I know for a fact that on Circumluna total communism —"

"Gentlemen!" I politely silenced them with my deepest voice, then rapidly explained, "I am indeed an actor, a free-fall Shakespearean. Our company is stock only in the old theatrical sense of employing stock characters, or types, though most of us are more versatile than that implies. While it is my father who owns the company, though it has cooperative features and —"

"Family business, eh?"

"Yes," I told Black Cylinder. "And we do have ownership, often private, in space. If objects and operations are not owned and valued, who will care for them? Mister —?"

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Once again my hint that full introductions would be desirable was lost, this time because of the last recumbent, the one with the monocle. All this while he had been watching me with intensest interest, like a schoolboy impatient to recite or demonstrate and constantly jiggling about on his couch working his features in addition to his tic, so that I expected it surely each time to dislodge the glass circle which magnified his left eye owlishly.

Now, as if obeying an impulse became irresistible, he sprang up and darted toward me, violet-clad houseboys altering their orbits to clear him a path. He stopped in front of me and, stooping and rearing, scanned my exoskeleton up and down. His fingers constantly fluttered over it without quite touching it; perhaps because I folded my arms, and staying most erect, gave him a slight frown.

"I am extremely interested . . . in *machinery*," he said in the enthusiastic but confidential tones of one who tells you, "I have a thing about flagellation." He continued, "In particular: prosthetic, waldoic, and robotic machinery. Oh, beautiful, beautiful! A strength-in-delicacy far beyond us. What lofting! Nature's own skeleton translated to T beams . . . with a thousand improvements! Such tiny servo-motors, yet so clearly powerful! What space-saving in battery housings! I take it that without this peerless device you would be . . . completely helpless here?"

"Yes, even in one lunagrav, let alone six," I admitted, somewhat taken off guard by his exclamations, "Mister —?"

He only continued his fantastical praises with, "And how perfect a twin, or symbiote rather, your own body is! — as if bred to fit this one superb prosthetic and no other! Bone and metal in a perpetual exquisite embrace or communion . . ."

I began to feel too much like a starved slavegirl stripped on the auction block, so that when he actually began to circle behind me, I turned so as to continue to face him. He speeded up, then suddenly reversed, without getting in back of me. As this nonsensical ballet continued, I began a series of calisthenics, knee-bends chiefly and head-circlings and rapid arm-extensions that missed his hair-carpeted dome by fractional inches. He flinched not a whit, such was his ecstatic concentration. He was of German extraction, most likely, I decided — which would fit the cropped hair and monocle, standard stage-indices of the Teuton.

Governor Lamar, who had been totally absorbed in a most diffi-

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cult episode of lint-picking, since it involved the left shoulder of his suit close to his neck, now put a stop to our ridiculous *pas de deux* with a, "Professor Fanninowicz! Scientific curiosity can come later, if our visitor permits. Mister Christopher Crockett La Cruz, I wish to present to you Professor Cassius Krupp Fanninowicz, who heads the engineering school at UTD."

"Charmed!" the professor assured me, making the word hum. But his eyes continued to race over my exoskeleton as he very lightly pressed my hand, which extended bare of metallic or other support from my titanium wrist-plate. I felt mightily tempted, but controlled myself.

The governor's gaze began to creep toward his right shoulder, but with a perceptible effort he looked up and continued, "I also wish to present to you, sir, Chaparral Houston Hunt, Commander in Chief of the Texas Rangers, and Big Foot Charlie Chase, Sheriff of Dallas," pointing in turn at Black Cylinder and the Scratcher. "But Mister — or do you prefer Senor? — La Cruz, I've been remiss in my hospitalities. I've sent for my daughter, as I wished to present her too, but since she's delayed, would you care to recline —" He indicated an empty couch near at hand "— and partake of refreshment? Professor, perhaps you too would now be more comfortable on your own couch."

"Senor suits best," I said on one of my typical impulses, carefully letting myself down onto the couch indicated, while Fanninowicz heeded the Governor's suggestion, though obviously disappointed at not being able to witness more closely the new bendings of my exoskeleton.

"Thank you," I added to the governor, meaning it. Twenty minutes on my titanium footplates had left me suddenly fatigued. I tongued in my three sorts of pills, then almost closed my eyes as relaxation hit me — except that I saw the governor frowning a question at me. He looked toward Elmo, then faintly frowned at me again. I hesitated, then responded with a slight smile and nod.

"Mr. Earp," the governor said, "you take a couch too — that one," pointing at one outside the circle of the rest of us. Elmo somewhat shamefacedly gave me a quick smile of gratitude as he hastened to obey.

Meanwhile houseboys had placed on the table to my right a glass of amber fluid chinking with ice-cubes and laid in a scalloped golden tray on the left-hand table a long reefer just set a-smolder with a hot point

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and a clever hand-suction device. But before taking either up, I once again scanned and sought to evaluate the Texans around me. The Mexicans could come later — there were more of them and in any case they seemed at first glance as alike as identical twins, psychically cyborged if not physically.

The Texans appeared to form two chief groups. Governor Lamar and Mayor Burleson were playing me up. Sheriff Chase and Ranger Hunt, despite curt nods and curter smiles when they'd been introduced to me by Lamar, were still putting me down. Why? That remained to be discovered.

Elmo's role at least was now altogether clear to me. He was the sort of minor political hanger-on who seeks to cadge small rewards, if only food, drinks and moments with the great, by inventing favors to do them, such as bringing them a stranded space-oddity, exactly as he might have brought them a wandering, halfwitted millionaire or good-looking showgirl. Yes, I had Elmo's number, all right, and my estimate was confirmed by the swiftness with which he latched onto a drink and reefer, also sending one of the houseboys for a large plate of appetizers. My feeling of growing friendliness toward him became mingled with a tolerant contempt.

Finally, there was the professor: seemingly all technical curiosity, which made him the easiest first object for the conversational attack I now mounted, with the intention of truly charming them all — the necessary first tactic of any traveler in a strange land.

"Sir," I said to him, "despite your Polish-sounding patronymic — pardon my familiarity — I take it you are of German extraction, an inheritor of the Teutonic scientific genius."

"I am indeed!" he responded, nodding so vigorously that I thought his monocle must surely go. "Only in Texas, sir, and the adjacent southwest could a Bavarian ever have found a spiritual home away from home. My great-great-great-grandfather came over with the first V-2's."

"The Atomic War?" I asked politely.

"No, World War Two, not Three," he informed me. "The V-2's lacked atomic warheads — my ancestor had a great sorrow about that — though they were the first true space vehicles."

"Tell me, gentlemen," I asked around. "How is it that Texas — or Texas, Texas rather — escaped the atomization which I gather the rest of North America endured?"

"It was all due to the supreme foresight of Lyndon the First and his immediate successors," Mayor

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Burleson took it on himself to explain. "Realizing that this was the true heartland of the continent, they walled it with anti-continental-ballistic-missile missile defenses; and drawing on the local excavation and drilling skill, they filled it with nuclear shelters of the deepest and most strongly roofed variety, constructing what may be called the Texas Bunker, though it was then known as the Houston Carlsbad Caverns Denver Kansas-City Little Rock Pentagram, or maybe Pentagon. A step of profound wisdom, Senor La Cruz, for which we have reason to always be eternally grateful."

"So that when the Atomic War finally came," Professor Fanninowicz took up with an excitement almost gleeful (Now the monocle must surely go!), "Russia, China, France, England, Black Africa, my own tormented and divided nation, and the outworks of the Texas Bunker were shattered, mangled, tattered! — while here snugly survived the virile spirit of Assyria, Macedon, Rome, Bavaria, and the brave Boers!" Now at last a tic coincided with a near screech and the monocle did pop out, though rather disappointingly he caught it deftly in his left hand and whipped it instantly back into its proper orbit, where it gleamed as brightly as his bared white teeth.

I meanwhile had taken the first of the three sips I allow myself of an alcoholic beverage — a small sip, for the drink was strong — and inhaled two puffs of marijuana vapor, a smoke I had never before sampled. It seemed mild stuff, but I soon began to feel a lofty well-being, despite the grisly things being told me, and the scene and sounds around and about me began to organize themselves symphonically, even the chinking of Mayor Burleson's coins fitting perfectly into the great rhythm. At first, I must admit, there was something sinister about the tiny tympanic tune of power-men releasing tension: TIC . . . clink, clink . . . scratch-scratch . . . squeeze, squeeze . . . faintest plink of thumb and fingertip on captured lint-speck . . . TIC! But swiftly even these noises became orchestrated into a blissful totality.

Mayor Burleson said, "Senor La Cruz, I don't doubt you come from space — in fact, I can't, seeing that handsome contraption you need to get around in gravity — but your middle name and height make me think you're originally a Texan who got the hormone. Now that hormone's a closely-guarded secret, sir — the lower orders of society and the rest of the world haven't grown up enough yet to be trusted with bigness — and we wouldn't like to

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think of it being known to the Longhairs of Circumluna."

I said in words dreamy and poetic, yet perfectly enunciated and of course still very deep-pitched, "I may well indeed be of Texan ancestry. There can be no certainty about it, for my grandfather lifted to the Sack from Spanish Harlem in New York City, yet my middle name whispers its hint, and the lines of heredity are as mysteriously interwoven as the curves of the clouds now gathering above us to enchant our gaze. But as for your last fear, Mayor, set your mind at rest. In free fall, unconfined by gravity, human growth is freer and sometimes almost fantastical. My grandfather was tall and slender, my father more so, and I still more so. My mother too is of considerable length, though it is her pleasure to be a Fat."

The whole scene around me, though darkening toward sunset, presented itself to me with supernormal clarity, each detail a gem.

I took another small sip of my drink, but returned the reefer to its tray — a little of that stuff was enough for my attenuated physiology, as with most drugs. My feelings had reached a harmonious acme, why spoil it? I felt marvelously relaxed and at peace. I placed a titanium heel atop a titanium toes-guard, in effect crossing my legs for comfort as I noted several of my companions had done, and continued, "Yet I feel greatly at home here, a Texan in spirit if not in fact. You are no longer my hosts, but my dear friends. Senor La Cruz is all very well, but I would be happier if you called me Chris — or perhaps Scully, the name Mr. Earp bestowed on me from my cadaverousness."

"That's fine, Scully, call me Atoms," Burleson responded. However, I noted the Commander, the Sheriff, and the Professor bristled almost imperceptibly — my senses were vastly acute at the moment — and gave the Mayor slightly dark looks, a pale shade of gray, while the Governor was moodily absorbed watching a houseboy wipe his gleaming boots with a white pocket handkerchief he'd given him. I determined to charm them in spite of themselves and at that moment remembered an anecdote.

I took the third sip of my drink and firmly set it down. "Gentlemen," I said somewhat sharply, "Whatever I am in fact, I feel myself a Texan at this moment, sharing your expansive relaxation, your wide wisdom, your tolerance, your homely but huge humor. May I tell you a story?"

I was pleased to note that it was the Governor who gave me the nod. It had been to rouse him that I'd spoken sharply.

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"When time was young," I said, speaking softly, "God was sitting by a mud puddle, dabbling his fingers in the dirty water and playing with the mud. Because, you see, all things were young then and even God was a youth. Think of him as Ometecutli, the Papa-God of the Mexicans, but not yet a papa, only a young and stocky barefoot sun-tanned God in ragged pants, playing like the village *loco* in a universe of water and clay, of love and flowers.

"First he made balls of the clay and pitched them out and up so that they went spinning round and round, forever. So he created the sun, the moon, the planets and the whole great universe.

"After a while he grew tired of this sport. Looking into the mud-puddle, he saw for the first time his reflection. 'I will make something like that,' he said.

"So he made of clay the figure of a man, giving him a coat and shoes, for God was poor then and thought such things very fine, and making his hair very short, for at the moment God was a novice sculptor, and curls and such were beyond him.

"Then he chanced to breathe on the figure as he was admiring it closely. To his amazement, the instant his breath struck the figure, it stood up on the palm of his hand and began to march about there, doing a goose-step."

Smiling gently at Professor Fanninowicz, I continued, "Seeing this, God said to himself, 'Ah-ha, a little German,' and he reached out and set down the figure in Germany.

"Next God made a woman. He gave her a long skirt and long wavy hair — for God was gaining skill now — and he put a high comb in her hair. He breathed upon her, and she stood up and began to sing most beautifully. 'Ah-ha, a little Italian,' he said to himself, and he set her down in Italy.

"Thus God made the Englishmen, the Frenchman, the Russian, the Negro, the Hindu, the heathen Chinee and almost all other breeds of Earth.

"God was growing somewhat tired now, and his supply of clay was getting low, so to speed things up he made two male figures at once, giving them only his own simple garb. When he breathed upon them, they sprang up instantly and began to fight with each other. 'Two little Mexicans,' God said, putting them down in Mexico.

"He had not quite enough clay left for two more figures, so to finish his task — for although a *loco*, God was a conscientious worker and wasted nothing — he made and dressed one great tall figure. This still left him with

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some clay, so he made a great wide-brimmed hat for the figure and chaps for its legs and fine boots. Two small dabs of clay were left, so he used them to give the boots high heels. Two more dabs of clay of the tiniest were still left, and so that nothing might be lost, God made of them spurs for the boots.

"He breathed on the figure. Nothing happened. God was startled. Had he made a mistake? Perhaps the magic did not work for large figures. Yet he breathed on the figure again, much harder.

"God thought he saw the figure stir a little. So he drew a deep breath and blew fiercely on the figure. His breath was like a gale or a tornado.

"The figure only pulled the brim of his great hat down over his eyes and crossed his boots and, linking his hands behind his neck, began to snore there where he lay on God's palm.

"God became very angry. He drew in a tremendous breath, puffed out his cheeks and breathed upon the figure that was like a hurricane of hurricanes, like the shock wave of an atomic bomb!

"Without stirring otherwise at all, the figure pushed back his hat from his face and, looking God straight in the eye, demanded, 'Who the Hell do you think you're spittin' at?' "

The laughter which greeted this tale gratified me. Even Chaparral Houston Hunt grinned and pounded his leg.

Before the applause had faded, I said loudly to them all, though I made a point of looking at Lamar, "So it was in the beginning, and so it still appears to be true of that great land stretching from Nicaragua to the Northwest Territory. Speaking of the latter, I trust I will have your aid in journeying to Amarillo Cuchillo tomorrow."

"Whatever you want, Scully!" To my surprise, it was Sheriff Chase who first answered. "Oh, that tale took us Texans off to perfection."

"Ask anything, Scully!" Again to my surprise, it was Commander Hunt who seconded. Elmo was standing beside him. "Sure you don't want to leave tonight? — though we'll hate to lose you. Of course, we could have a round of partying first."

"Tomorrow would be best," I replied, thinking of La Cucaracha. "And as for partying, I thank you from heart's bottom, yet I fear this one will be all I can take. Although my exoskeleton is tireless even in Earth-grav, my bone one and its envelope are not. It will be best for me if I spend the night in lonely quiet and rest." I was seeking to set up a situation in which it would be easy for me

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to make my sneak back to the cemetery.

And I didn't have too much time, come to think of it. The sun had already set and moonrise would come but two hours later. To one who lives in space near Luna, keeping track of Earth's phases is second nature. She is our month-clock.

"Not altogether lonely, I hope, Senor La Cruz — ho-ho, the German put down in Germany, very funny —" Professor Fanninowicz boomed at me heartily, "— for I hope to spend the night at your side, studying your magnificent exoskeleton and perhaps experimenting —"

"Senor La Cruz shall spend his time as he sees fit," Governor Lamar cut in with authority. "The first demand of hospitality is consideration for —"

He broke off to get to his feet and turn toward the Gringo Door. The other men copied him. I could see without turning, but just the same I got up as rapidly as possible.

Since landing on Terra, I had experienced three great liftings of spirit. The first had been La Cucaracha. The second, marijuana. The third was the slender, statuesque female we now faced.

Oh, I didn't forget La Cucaracha in the least, and I remained as firmly determined as before to be beside her at moonrise. But now, suddenly illumined by the sun's silvery afterglow from the clouds above, there was a gorgeous counterattraction.

She was nearly as tall as I and of Junoesque proportions, but compared with the male Texans she was slender. She wore Grecian robes of a pale silvery silk which left an ample area of alabaster shoulders and bosom bare and fell in perfect folds to the floor. I had never seen the like, even on stage — one simply cannot achieve that wonderful classic draping without gravity to help.

Her face was at the moment grave and mystic, though subtly seductive. A youthful Athena or Artemis, rather than Aphrodite. In one pale hand she held a scroll with silver knobs.

Her platinum-blonde hair was piled high. Tiny lights winked in it. Under her arching brows, her pale blue eyes were fixed on mine. For a second time on Terra I had lost my heart — something my father tells me a young man can't do too often, provided it doesn't interfere with rehearsals and he never misses an entrance or a cue.

"Senor Christopher La Cruz," Governor Lamar said, "I wish to introduce to you my dear daughter, the Honorable Rachel Vachel Lamar. Sugar, I've been waiting for you quite a while."

"Hush up, Daddy," the goddess

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said, wrinkling that delectable nose in a miffy grin. "To honor our guest properly I had to dart into my Diana costume — she's the Roman moon goddess, Daddy — and then I had to snatch time to dash off a poem of greeting. I'll read it now, if all you verse-scorning menfolk don't mind."

Then without pausing to note whether they did, she struck a pose that I had to admit was most amateurish (but the more delightful for that) and recited in an elocution-school voice that occasionally squeaked and/or went husky and invariably found the worst spots to suck in an over-obvious breath (yet how it all stole the heart!):

Ho, traveler from outer space!
How swell to see your sunk-cheek face,
Your somber form that's flagstaff-trim,
Your flashing eye and sword-slim limb.

She must have got an earlier glimpse of me, I realized, perhaps from an upstairs window, embowered like a Moslem maiden. The poem continued:

We've gazed at your abode for years
Serene o'er earthly joys and tears,
It sails the sky without a sound
A million miles above the ground.

We never thought we'd get a chance
To hold a moon man in our glance,
But here you've dropped out of the blue
And all of Texas welcomes you!

The other men applauded politely, Elmo fortissimo. As she moved forward toward stage-center — a little too fast and coltish for a goddess, but just right for a girl — I swiftly intercepted her, caught hold of her hand and bowed over it, pressing it briefly to my lips.

Then as I stood "flagstaff-trim" again, holding her hand a moment longer, I said, "Miss Lamar, I never have been so moved since when clutched in the arms of my mother, who was doubling as a member of the mob, I first heard my father give Antony's oration."

It was borderline truth, though I had been moved in different ways. My father had terrified me in that black toga.

"Go on, you flatterer, you," she giggled, giving me a playful shove that sat me back on my titanium heelplates.

Then her eyes got big. "Your pa's an *actor?*" They got bigger still. "*You're* an actor too — you stayed one?"

I shrugged. "Oh an occasional Hamlet, Peer Gynt, Orestes, Cyrano . . ."

I could have sworn that for an instant she was going to hug me. Instead she looked me up and down, grinned and said, "I bet you overlapped your ma to either side when she clutched you."

"Yes and she wrinkled her nose too," I countered. "I wet myself."

Governor Lamar said, "My colleagues and I have a bit of busi-

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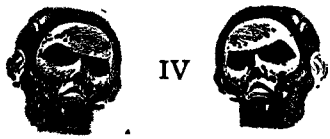
ness to finish discussing before dinner. Senor La Cruz, I imagine you and my daughter can entertain each other for the while. You appear to have interests in common."



IV

RACHEL VACHEL

"Tell me some more, Captain Skull. But let me light you another reefer."

"Thank you, princess. But perhaps you will tell me something for a change. What is moths?"

"Furry butterflies."

"What is . . . are butterflies?"

"Butterflies is — Oh, they're like two tiny swatches of batik or embroidery flappin' along. And you'll likely be seeing a few moths in a few minutes for yourself. We even got lunar ones in honor of your homeland. Go on talkin' theater of space —"

"Very well, princess. Yes, acting in three dimensions in free fall has its special techniques and requires its special conditions. For instance, upstage lies in all directions from stage-center, but so does down-stage. You must learn to favor all sections of the audience by rotation in at least two planes, and that requires motivated or surreptitious contact with the other actors on stage. Also, to make an exit, you must take off from another actor or preferably several, and there should be a counterbalancing entrance — unless you use an air jet or are drawn off by fine-wire, devices we try to avoid. Ideally, 3D nulgrav acting becomes dramatic ballet with dialogue. Think of *Don Juan in Hell,* the actors afloat, or of Antony's oration again, with the mob a ragged sphere between the orator and the larger sphere of the audience."

"Oh, it all sounds so excitin' — makes our little theater here seem positively earthbound, even though Daddy insists on spending millions on lighting and special effects and sets. Sometimes a heap too much of those; we wanted to do *Our Town* the right way but Daddy insisted on building us a real town with the smallest house big as the Petit Trianon. We actors were positively lost among those gingerbread skyscrapers. And I had to bust into tears seventeen times before he'd drop his plan to build us a life-size, practical, moving glacier for *Skin of Our Teeth.*"

"The last time we put on *Our Town,* princess, we used only six kitchen chairs borrowed from the Circumluna Museum of Terran Domestic Artifacts — all floating, of course, as I mentally float now."

"Oh, spit! I might have known.

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But do go on, Captain Skull, please."

Our "interests in common" had indeed drawn the Honorable Rachel Vachel and me closer together, and in less than ten minutes. Our princess-Captain Skull personae derived from her conceit that I was Sir Francis Drake reporting the unknown lands of the Pacific to a youthful Queen Elizabeth. We were seated side-by-side in the gracious dusk on a large couch facing the dark horizon with its mysterious truncated cones across the very faintly shimmering ripples of the vast swimming pool (Rachel had identified that for me and assured me it was water), and we were quite alone. My companion had shooed out all the Mexican houseboys shortly after her father's departure.

I was still determined to keep my date with La Cucaracha — after all, she seemed the earthier and more easily had of the twain — but at the moment I was stealing my left arm along the top of the couch behind Rachel Vachel's ivory shoulders and also an occasional eye-wander down her delicious frontal decolletage.

"Wilder is one of our minor favorites among the old playwrights," I meanwhile continued. "He rouses and satisfies simply and beautifully our nostalgia for Terra. Other old ones often in our repertory are Ibsen, Bergman (we live-stage his films), Shaw, Wycherly, Moliere, Euripedes, Gorky, Chekhov, Brecht, Shakespeare of course, and —"

"Hush, you're makin' me drool green with envy! Our group's forever tryin' to stage real serious plays like *Macbeth* or *Pillars of Society* or *The Gods of the Lightning* or *Waitin' for Lefty* or *Manhattan Project* or *Frisco After the Fallout* or *Uncle Tom's Cabin* or *Intolerance* (let Daddy use his hundred millions live-stagin' that, I say) or *Streetcar . . .* but — wouldn't you know it? — Daddy's forever insistin' on *another* revival of *Oklahoma,* callin' it *Texiana,* of course, and usin' Corpus Christi or Texarkana 'stead of Kansas City, to make it scan, and five times out of six Daddy gets his way. And even then he won't let me play Ado Annie, the Cain't-say-no girl — always got to have some little Mex on stilts for that part."

Edging my arm a little closer, I remarked, "Your father seemed to me a most courteous and mild gentleman."

"Mild? Huh! You should see him when —"

In turning to make her comment she had suddenly leaned back against my slithering arm. Now with a little scream she bent

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forward, quickly turning her head to remark, "My, that skeleton of yours is awfully chilly, Captain Skull. Can't you take it off even for a little while, while you're on Earth?"

"To my great regret, no," I informed her. "Without it, I literally could not move an arm or leg or lift my head. While a fall, especially without exoskeletal protection, might easily fracture a limb or my skull. I have just begun to realize that when one is eight and a half feet tall, one has a lot of farther to fall in gravity than —"

"Don't explain to me about that. I'm eight foot two myself, and I know all about chipped and busted bones. Well, we can't have you fracturing yourself, that's for sure, you spacemen are too precious, so . . ." she gave a small sigh of resignation ". . . I guess I just got to endure the chilliness," and she flopped herself back against my arm before I could have withdrawn it, had I intended to.

She turned her face toward mine. Amid the mists of her platinum hair, her eyes were dark pools of wonder in which the stars glimmered faintly.

"Anything for Texas — that's a joke," she said. "Go on, Captain Skull, tell me some more."

"But there are many things I would like *you* to tell *me*, chiefly about yourself," I countered, carelessly draping my free hand across my knee so that it happened lightly to touch one of hers. She did not move that leg. "I know you are a poet," I said. "Are you by any chance also a playwright?"

"Oh, I got a little old script or two in a secret compartment in my lingerie drawer," she admitted nonchalantly. "But don't for worlds whisper a word about them to Daddy. One of them's called *Houston's Afire*, and another *Storm over El Paso*."

"I also would guess that you are named for a poet," I continued. "Vachel Lindsay."

"My, you're brilliant, Captain Skull, I never dreamed anyone on Earth, let alone in the sky, remembered anything about that little old *Chinese Nightingale* or *General Booth*."

"Rachel Vachel," I said, leaning toward her, "the first poem of any length my father ever taught me was *The Congo*. That is, after Chesterton's *Lepanto*."

"Recite *Lepanto!*" she commanded me, but before I could utter "White founts falling . . .," she countermanded that with, "No, don't! Daddy and his crew'll be back any minute, and that poem's too long, much as I'd be ravished by it. Lemme think."

"Rachel Vachel," I asked, as my free fingers lightly

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walked up the silvery silk draping her thigh, "there is an aspect of the landscape puzzles me — the many conical towers."

"Oh those!" she said impatiently. "Those are just oilwells. Grandpa insisted on keeping the derricks for sentimental reasons, but Grandma thought they were unaesthetic and made him cover them up with those antimacassar lighthouses, I call 'em. Antimacassars were originally doilies to keep hair-oil off chair backs, you know. I'd rather the naked derricks again — be honester."

"And the two very much larger and newer towers?" I continued. It is sometimes effective, I think, to talk of irrelevant matters while moving closer to a female. Besides, I have a curiosity which operates simultaneously on all levels, and when the sexual is awakened, all the others are too. "Only two much larger oilwells?"

"Fact is, I don't know the answer to that myself," Rachel Vachel said, anger in her voice.

"When they built them six months ago, I asked Daddy, but he put me off with his standard lecture about how women shouldn't interest themselves in science and technology, but culture and religion only. I tried to ride out to them a couple times, but got turned back." Suddenly she sat up straight, though clapping a hand over my free one, which had reached her waist. Now her voice was entirely exasperated anger on the verge of tears. "Oh, Captain Skull! You don't know how Daddy strangulates me, hidin' a whim of patriarchal Texan iron under all that suffocatin' courtliness and courtesy. I'm supposed to get bowed to and stood up for and my feminine mystique done reverence, at the price of limitin' my activities to silly little poems and reproductions of *Oklahoma* and *Babes in Toyland* and *The Wizard of Oz* with a Texas 'stead of a Kansas Dorothy — yes, and of bein' bossed around like a nine-year-old! Honest, some days I wish I could die!" That outburst over, she instantly flopped back against my left arm, throwing her own right arm over it to keep it from straying, as if it would, and leaning her lovely white-misted head against it so that she could dark-wonder me even more effectively with her glimmering eyes.

"Go on, tell me some more,"

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she murmured meltingly. "Tell me some more about acting in the Sack." She sighed softly, at least for a young woman eight foot two, and added wistfully, "I suppose all you actors up there are stars, just like the ones twinklin' above us now."

"Far from it, princess," I told her, my left hand beginning to feather-stroke her bare shoulder and my right hand resuming its tiptoe journey. "Our situation is far more like that of any Shakesperean or later actors in puritanic Northern Europe and America before the Twentieth-Century deification of entertainers. We are no better than strolling players — worse, because with vacuum outside we have nowhere to stroll when things get hot for us. We are given no special honor by our fellow Sackabonds, and at times we are denounced and threatened by Circumluna's scientists, engineers and technicians, on whose continuing ticket-buying, nonetheless, we depend for the essentials of life. In that sense we are much like the artists of the Renaissance, dependent on the patronage of their individual princes — our prince being the Circumlunan Establishment. Him we must please, or starve, and the former is as difficult as the latter is easy."

" 'Renaissance' is just the word I was looking for to describe you!" Rachel interrupted. "You're like one of those tall, thin, somber-lookin', small steppin' Spanish Grandees — the kind that wear great cloaks and hats with black plumes and are deadly duelists. You fence and duel, by any chance?"

"Those were among my first accomplishments," I contented myself with saying. I was tempted to give her a demonstration which might have surprised her, but it would have interrupted our passage toward togetherness, so I stifled my vanity.

"I might have known, you bein' an actor," she said. "Go on about those Longhairs you put on your plays for."

"The scientists, yes. Well, you see, princess, they began over a hundred years ago as — and have continued to be — quite rigid, asthetically puritanic types. They greatly need the catharsis we give them with our dramas — everything from high tragedy to low comedy — but there are always those among them whose violent, temporarily uncatharsized desires, masquerading as high scientific conscience, demand our muzzling and even our expulsion. They accuse us of great sexual laxity, thievery, political and social irresponsibility, corrupting the morals of the young, and dirty personal habits such as not

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sterilizing our night soil before returning it into the ecologic cycle. In short, all the things actors have been accused of since Egg-oh the Exhibitionistic Cave Man first cavorted in front of the nightly fire."

"Scuse me, Captain, but your left-arm skeleton bone's cuttin' into my neck," Rachel Vachel interrupted. "There, that's better. Tell me, do you consider me one of the young? I mean as far as corruptin' morals is concerned. Don't answer that one, just keep it up — talkin' too."

I continued, "At present the puritanic faction of Circumlunans, composed somewhat more of those of Russian heritage than those of Americo-West European extraction, is in the ascendency. With the lifting of the Interdict, they are demanding that not only we actors, but all Sackabonds not doing vital part-time technological work for Longhairs be deported to Earth. The great majority of Circumlunans don't want this at all — we're almost their sole source of fun and frenzy — but being respectable bourgeois technocrats to a man (and a woman) nearly, they daren't speak out against the highly vocal hyperpuritanic minority. The only solution for us, of course, is the age-honored one of buying off the Establishment with Circumlunan-acceptable cash — meaning funds available on Terra for buying Moon-short elements and materials the Circumlunans still find it difficult if not impossible to synthesize. It's to win that cash to defend from deportation all Sackabonds, but in particular the personnel and properties of the La Cruz Theater-in-the-Sphere, that I've come down to earth, Rachel Vachel."

I could feel her quiver with new excitement under my fingers. "You mean, you're goin' to put on *shows* down here to raise funds? No, don't stop what you're doin'. Remember, you got your reputation for great sexual laxity to maintain and I got my Daddy to spite. But in that case why not star with the Dallas Little Theater, with the title role in *Death Takes a Holiday* for a starter? I'm sure I could swing it, and Daddy's got pots!"

"Alas, Princess, the doctors assure me that even with the constant exoskeletal support and large periods of rest, I dare not stay more than a week on Terra, or at a risky most, two, without suffering large permanent physiological damage. They expressly warned me against —"

I cut off that one quick, and the thought behind it too. Among the activities against which they had expressly warned me was the one in which I was now engaged, and I didn't want to start ques-

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tioning my knowledge, superior to that of any doctor, of my own psychosomatic needs. Especially not now, when I was aboard the primeval rocket and the countdown started.

I contented myself with saying, "No, princess, I do not intend to put on any public performances down here."

She did not pursue her question, nor appear to take note of my interrupted remark. With the gathering dusk and perhaps in some part because of my delicate manipulations, her eyes grew larger and more luminous. Her fingers slipping between my titanium shoulder girdle and head basket touched my cervical vertebrae. Her voice riding on indrawn and exhaled sighs, she said, "You know, Scully, I believe I'm fallin' in love with you just a little bit — psychically, I mean, not only physiologically. Ever since I was a little girl I've had moods of despair where I wanted Death to come to me like a dark knight and carry me off. I wore out three tapes of Schubert's *Death and the Maiden* — and here you're doin' it. Why, you're just like Death in *The Seventh Seal*, leadin' me off in a dreamy dance — that is, if Max von Sydow had played the part 'stead of doin' the Knight. Say, Scully — no, keep it up — how are you ever gonna raise that cash down here you need to save your theater unless you put on shows? I'd give you some, except Daddy's a skinflint when it comes to pin-money."

"I'll tell you a secret, Rachel Vachel," I said, my rumble somewhat thick as she was shivering three fingers, thrust between my titanium exo-ribs, across my chest. What the devil, I'd already told her far more than I'd intended — I might as well, as Elmo would have put it, go it whole hog. "Before my grandfather lifted from Spanish Harlem, he had bought from a down-and-out Aleutian prospector a mining claim to an area near Yellowknife, Canada. I mean Amarillo Cuchillo, North Texas. This claim was supposedly worthless, but the Aleutian who had bought it from a Cree Indian had investigated the area closely and discovered that within it lay the Lost Crazy-Russian Pitchblende Mine, and he had drawn a map of the mine's exact location. My father treasured the claim and the map as an ace in the hole to revive the La Cruz fortunes in time of trouble. They were useless during the Interdict, but now that that's over and the time of trouble come for us and the entire Sack, my father has sent me down to sell the claim or seize the profits if someone else has meanwhile discovered it and been working it illegally."

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"My, your pa must be quite a . . . a dreamer, Scully," Rachel Vachel murmured languidly. "That sounds to me just like the million and one Lost Dutchman Gold Mines down in Mexico, Texas. Oh, but I'm dead sure it's going to work out fine in your case," she hastened to add. Then, the dark-wondering peaking in her eyes, "Kiss me, Scully."

Carefully tilting my head so neither my titanium jaw-shelf nor cheek plates would touch her, I planted my lips on hers. Her hands moved on my back between titanium T spine and exo-rib lattice. We kissed for some time with small moans. Then she broke away with a slightly bigger one, in which I heard faintly the whispered words, "Come sweet death . . ." and her voice returned to medium brisk as she asked, "You didn't leave the claim and map in your luggage, I hope? Daddy's sure to have that snooped, 'scoped and espioned."

"But surely your father is too honorable and courtly and genteel —"

"Oh, he's the genteelest jail warden in all Texas, Texas. Why do you suppose I have secret compartments in my lingerie drawers? If he could only see right now — You know, Scully, we must be making a most exciting scene: a Greek goddess bein' elegantly seduced by a romantical black-and-silver skeleton, the matin' of the mantis with the june bug — just the kind of scene Daddy'll never let us stage in our plays, the courtly old Cromwell! Where have you got the claim and the map, Scully? You didn't forget and leave them up there in the sky, I hope?"

"I keep them on my person, princess."

"That's nice," she murmured, gently stroking same. "Say, Scully, what's your impression of the Mexican situation down here? I mean *seriously* — no, you keep it up too — and truly. Answer honest, now."

"I hope this doesn't offend you, Rachel, but my answer must be: deeply disturbing. The childish and superficially humorous servitude of your Spanish Americans, I mean Spanish Texas, I find disgusting. And those cybernetic yokes — abominable!"

"That's interesting," she murmured. "Now what's your attitude on revolution? No, keep it up."

I must admit that her rapid and startling questions were putting me off stride a bit, like one-two punches, no matter how well they conformed to my own philosophy of all curiosities satisfied simultaneously. But I gathered my forces and carried on, on both levels.

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"Revolution in Circumluna and the Sack? No. Except for the Longhairs' puritanic blind spot, we are all too intelligent for it up there. Besides, we are too deeply interdependent, and the Longhairs hold all the cards. Down here? I don't know. From what little I've seen of them, hoping for a Mexican revolution would be like expecting a revolt of the babies. *Emotionally* I sympathize greatly with revolution. I identify. Among my most favorite roles are Cassius, Dr. Stockman in *An Enemy of the People,* Danton, Lord Byron, Lenin, Sam Adams, Fidel Castro, John Brown, and Ho Chi Minh."

"Oh I can just see you as Cassius. You got that 'lean and hungry' look to perfection. You're going to devour little Rachel, aren't you? Go Waltzing-Matilda with her? Promise? Or Ho too — you have the Dr. Fumanchu touch: 'Beware, America! You got your napalm and atomic bombs, but I got my black scorpions, my giant centipedes, my spiders with diamond eyes that wait in the dark, then leap!' Golly! Or maybe I could work up a drama around that legendary figure of *El Esqueleto* — you'd be *great* as him. Say, there's an idea! But Daddy — oh forget it. Look here, dear, I admit I'm getting a fetish about that skeleton of yours but couldn't you get out of it for just a little while? Mayn't you be underestimating your unmechanized strength? Your hands feel so *strong* on my funny bumps."

I was deeply moved at that, I must confess. For some reason I could now see more plainly again my lovely eight-foot-two pale goddess in her artistically disarranged robes. A mysterious silver light bathed her and made me utterly reckless.

"Look, darling," I whispered breathily and rapidly, "If we're careful it's not necessary that I —"

I do not know what would have happened next, or rather I know exactly what would have happened next, and a disaster to have missed it, or more likely a disaster to have enjoyed it . . . anyhow, Rachel Vachel pushed me away with a sharply whispered, "They're coming back!" I heard the footsteps myself then, growing louder behind us, and I nervously smoothed my sack suit and evened my breathing. The next moment, her drapery and platinum hair in order, she was handing me a glow-tipped reefer and saying coolly, "Here you are, Senor La Cruz, a Chihuahua Pot-Perfecto. Daddy always says a man can't smoke on tobacco alone."

As I shakingly inhaled the first piney puff, I looked straight out

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at the horizon again and saw that my "mysterious silver light" was merely that of the new-risen moon, silhouetting one of the big antimacassar lighthouses. I realized somewhat groggily but with a clutch of anxiety that I had not only missed my big moment with Rachel Vachel, but was already breaking my date with La Cucaracha.

The patio lights boomed on. I copied Rachel Vachel in leisurely standing up and casually turning around, though I spoiled the effect a bit by clanking my exo-elbow against my pelvic girdle. Just come through the gringo door were Governor Lamar and his four fellow big-wigs, all looking a shade grim to me, and Elmo, who looked worried.

"Most sorry to interrupt your tete-a-tete," the Governor said smoothly, "I trust you weren't bored, Senor La Cruz, and that my daughter entertained you adequately."

I could manage no answer save a swallow, which bobbed my overly prominent Adam's apple, and a somewhat jerky nod.

"Now go to bed, Sugar," he continued. "We have business to discuss with the Senor."

"But Daddy —"

"Sugar . . .!"

With a haughty shrug and thinning of lips, the Honorable Rachel Vachel turned to me and said formally, "Good night, Senor La Cruz. I trust we have the opportunity of continuing our most interesting conversation some other *day*." And she stuck out her hand, palm down.

I pressed and bowed over it. Though not risking a kiss this time, I did lightly scratch her palm with my forefinger.

Showing no reaction whatsoever, she turned away and walked through the gringo door without looking to left or right.

From the emphasis she had given her last word, I knew I could expect no opportunity of further converse with her this night and must pin on La Cucaracha any hopes I had of getting my jangled nerves soothed, especially my frustrated parasympathetic system.

But to tell the whole truth, I was far, far more — oh so much! — concerned about the five unsmiling, craggy-visaged Texans I now faced, and it was chiefly my sympathetic nervous system, that old adrenal-squeezer, that was sending. Old tales of the vengeances done in patrist societies on daughter-seducers and sister-stealers and mere lovers-up marched like a series of funeral corteges through my mind. I thought of Abelard and Chance Wayne. Rachel Vachel had as much as told me her father was

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a constant spier on her activities. Would he have omitted those on the patio? Wouldn't he be sure to have had the couch bugged? And I had blurted out not only my grotesque passion, but also the secrets behind my trip to Terra. I cursed myself for an Eros-besotted fool.

It seemed to me most ominous that all five power-men were now equipped with paired side arms belted over their beautifully tailored suits. In addition, anachronistic rapiers hung from the hips of Sheriff Chase and Ranger Hunt, and all five were once more making their nerve-twanging chink-chink, scratch-scratch tune.

It struck me as particularly sinister that the Governor was plucking invisible lint from his vest *without taking his eyes off me.*

Then as Rachel Vachel vanished and her rapid footsteps died away and I expected the worst, everything suddenly changed for the best, as at the fairy-godmother moment in a children's tale. I could hardly have been more surprised if dancing elves had popped from under the flagstones.

The five power-Texans relaxed and favored me with friendly smiles, while with the most winning of these, the Governor himself, advanced toward me, saying, "Senor La Cruz, most honored and patient of guests, it's my pleasure to inform you that all arrangements save one have been made for your passage by chartered private rocketship to Amarillo Cuchillo tomorrow morning." And he lightly took my limp hand and pumped it warmly though carefully. His breath was redolent of bourbon.

He went on casually, "The one omission is most trifling and really unnecessary to correct except for reasons of courtesy. It's that we visit tonight and get the countersignature on your jet-charter of President Longhorn Elijah Austin. The old gentleman would be hurt to have missed a visit with you, and — *sub rosa*, sir — we want to continue a little political fence-mending."

I hesitated. The Governor's expression seemed totally relaxed and friendly, free from guile as Tom Mix. I said, "But I thought —"

"Yes, sir, exactly, you *thought* — and no blame whatever attaches to you for that. But . . . Elmo!"

My old friend — I suddenly felt that way toward him — was twisting his huge hat into what looked like a model of a saddle-shaped universe, and he was working his lips and actually blushing. "Scully, I mean Senor La Cruz," he choked out, "I was reshading the facts a little . . . no,

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I was really lying to you quite a bit in our earlier conversations — chiefly by exaggerating my own importance and my inside knowledge of the current political situation.

"There was once indeed a little wounded feelings between President Austin and some of the other great statesmen of our land, but I blew them up out of all proportions. That arming of his Mexican houseboys, for instance, what a whopper! And for a fact I simply didn't know — that's how small a bug I am in the human menagerie — that what wounds there were had been completely healed and only in need of the lightest postoperative care. Just a lowdown Texas big-mouth, that's all I am, Scully, and I hope you forgive me."

"Of course, Elmo," I said quickly, embarrassed at his abject groveling, for that was what it had been, despite the humor with which he had pillowed it. I had grown to like Elmo, rather as one likes a clown. And to see a clown deflated, stripped or dissected is always bad, or at least uncomfortable theater.

I abruptly turned back to Lamar. "Is it necessary that my interview with President Austin take place tonight? I had rather —"

"I'm afraid it must, sir," he interrupted me. "A soiree rather than a matinee, as you gentlefolk of the stage put it. Your jet leaves early tomorrow, and I have already, pardon me, taken the liberty of arranging your reception by our beloved prexy. I can understand your desire for, nay, your medical need of rest, and I assure you the interview will be very brief and your transportation to and from it both rapid and unfatiguing."

"Quick and peaceful. Over in a wink," Sheriff Chase confirmed, snapping his fingers once for unnecessary emphasis.

As I hesitated again, I felt my reefer sting my fingers. Quickly shifting my grip back on the butt, I took a very long drag.

Perhaps it was the pot that gave me the inspiration and emboldened me to act on it.

"It wasn't rest I was concerned about," I said gaily. "Your hospitalities have quite refreshed me. It was that I had the whim to take all by myself tonight, by moonlight, a brief noctural jaunt through the quieter environs of your great city of freedom, employing for that purpose the catwagon with which Mr. Earp so graciously provided me. Let me do this, and I shall be only too happy to bandy amenities with your prexy."

Frowning slightly and even more slightly shaking his head, Lamar said slowly, "I'm afraid

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it's already been determined that you travel by official limousine. A cat-wagon would hardly have the requisite dignity —"

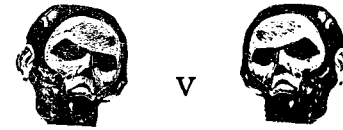
"Tell you what, Cotton," Sheriff Chase broke in, "we can bring the wagon along on a flatbed racer. Then soon as his meeting with Austin's over, the Senor can begin this little private wander on which it seems that he's set his heart."

"A happy inspiration!" Lamar said, his frown fading. "And now come, gentlemen, our time is growing short."

The loud clink of Burleson's coins was like a cymbal clash that begins a jolly march. Fanninowicz's facial tic was a "Forward!"

I took a last drag of my reefer, crushed it in the nearest tray and stepped out with my illustrious entourage, the rhythmic clash of my titanium footplates dominating the thud of their leather boots. My cape was handed up toward me, and I swirled it carelessly around my shoulder-girdle without breaking stride.

It occurred to me how villainous I was to arouse myself with one woman and then plan to satisfy myself with another. But such is human flesh — at least that of an audacious Thin with a perfectly tuned exoskeleton who was setting out on a planetary spree.



V

PRESIDENT'S MANSE

The downy, glimmer-windowed nest of darkness that was the limousine silently braked to a stop with a suddenness that mashed my face against my cheekplates. With tiny groans the straps around my titanium rib cage and belly-support tightened almost to breaking, then they were merely snug again. Beside me, Ranger Commander Hunt cursed a simple, "Jack it!" as the exo-elbow of my outflung arm took him lightly across his handsome Roman nose.

From the other side Sheriff Chase fumbled at my riding-harness, but I brushed his hands aside and deftly unsnapped the two straps myself. I was beginning to resent being treated as an invalid or baby. When they had got out, each almost tripping over his ceremonial sword — for such they had explained them to be — I followed Hunt as swiftly and surely as a tall metal monkey and found myself standing in the moonlight on a springy black driveway, the four other limousines drawn up in line two before and two behind and debouching their passengers, while to the extreme rear I thought I could make out the flatbed bearing my cat-wagon.

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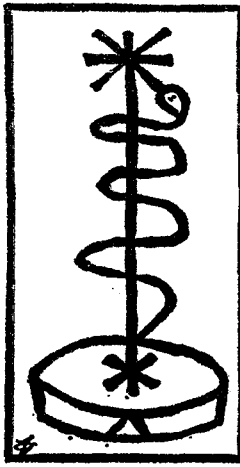
Had Society done its duty to itself, Ben Thompson instead of dying the death of a desperado might have become a useful citizen. [Ben Thompson was an early Texas antihero and often acquitted multi-killer of the late 1800's, himself finally shot to death with 9 bullets in an Austin variety theater.—ed.] But will the moral be read aright and turned to profit? It certainly will not unless Texas society purges itself of the complicity and indulgence which have so largely nurtured and developed the desperadoism in men. His is a slow growth and it is Texas society which encourages that growth by holding out the hope to him of achieving both fame and fortune in a career of murderous violence and professional terrorism.

—Galveston News



Texas is a wandering and tattered ribbon of white fascism, ineffectually separating the non-directive black democracies and hip republics of Florida and California, and occupying at most 2 percent of North America. Two cents worth of bloated, mentally bombed-out squaredom?

—*African America*, by Booker T. Nkrumah, Tuskegee Institut de la Vudu et Technologie Librairie

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The climbing moon silhouetted a spire and highlighted several others and also the three towers and slate roof of a vast building some 200 meters ahead. It looked to my scenery-trained eyes like a Gothic manse of old, specifically one of those fanciful carpenter's Gothic edifices of the late nineteenth century in America, abristle with balconies, columns and fretwork of Moorish, Baroque and other manners too numerous to list.

Not a single window of the place showed light.

There were no lights between me and it, only a low, pale wall with an arch of triumph for admittance to the driveway.

The limousines had all doused their headlamps.

It struck me that the stage had been set, not for a president's reception, but for a ghost story.

All it would have taken was one lighted window and a terrified beautiful girl in the foreground to make it the greatest of camp art.

As if he had caught my first thought, I heard Elmo, as he came up behind me, boom out with a little of his earlier free-and-easy, "That old miser Longhorn Elijah! He'll whup half to death a maid who leaves on a 25-watter over an escalator or in a john the instant someone has wiped himself. But soon as we pass the arch, Scully, the whole shebang'll light up like a veritable fairyland, I can tell you that."

A discreet chuckle I recognized as Governor Lamar's came from the figure approaching beside Elmo. He said, "Elmo puts it crudely, but it is true that President Austin is a thrifty old soul, providing a Simon-simple answer to those who accuse our officialdom of private prodigality. Well, sir, do you feel able to proceed afoot? I shouldn't like for the sake of your dignity to see you make a horizontal approach in a cat-wagon or stretcher, unless you feel it medically mandatory."

"We'd drive you straight to the door," Commander Hunt assured me, "but immemorial custom dictates that the prexy's mansion be approached afoot by all and sundry."

"Two of us'll walk close beside you and support you, of course," Sheriff Chase added. "Elmo, you take his right arm."

"Nonsense, gentlemen, I am quite able to navigate ungrasped and erect on my trusty exo-legs," I replied lightly, keeping out of my voice the gust of indignation I felt at this further evidence that they considered me a hospital patient.

And with that I stepped out toward the dark mansion.

Elmo stayed beside me, but fortunately for his ribs, which would

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have got a titanium dig, he did not attempt to touch me.

Professor Fanninowicz came hurrying up on my other side, fumbling with wires and chattering, "Sir, for the sake of science may I attach electrodes to — "

"No!" I rapped out.

"But may I not at least accompany you and observe —"

"Yes, but hands of!"

The dark figures which had emerged from the leading limousines parted for us. I noted that they wore dark uniforms which included knee-boots and black slouch hats and that they were armed with heavy laser-carbines. Ancient shell rifles or even antique powder-and-ball muskets would have seemed more appropriate ceremonial weapons to match Hunt's and Chase's swords. But then I remembered what Rachel had told me of her father's efforts to introduce an actual glacier into Wilder's Japanese-delicate *Skin of Our Teeth*. Hunt's rangers, I decided as we passed them, were lucky they had not been made to tote ceremonial atomic bombs.

Then Governor Lamar, stepping uncomfortably close behind me, almost on my heels, called out softly but carryingly, "Everyone move very slowly now! We don't want to hurry Senor La Cruz or cause him to strain his satellite-enfeebled heart."

That did it. As if hearts did not have to work well and efficiently in free fall merely to supply tissues with oxygen and other nutriment! Tissues such as the cerebrum, of which I now bet we spacefolk had twice the volume of these bumbling Texans! All butt and no brain, like dinosaurs!

I stepped out at my fastest, taking giant strides, my hood and cloak flapping behind me. In almost no time Elmo and Fanninowicz were panting. Such was my rage that I ignored my surroundings, not pausing to ponder the function of the trenches we were now passing, nor of the slitted walls of thick metal on their mansion-side edges, nor even of the dim figures crouched behind those walls.

But I did catch the gasping Fanninowicz attaching an electrode to my pelvic girdle. He already had one affixed to my shoulder yoke. The fine insulated wires faintly rattled against the drive behind us. Since he couldn't measure my body electricity, he was evidentally hoping to find some in my exoskeleton. I jerked the attachments loose and struck his hands away with a blow of my wrist-plate that got out of him an, *"Aiii! Teufel! Gottverdammter Knochen-Mensch!"*

"For bleedin' Jesus' sake, take it easy, Scully," Elmo pled between puffs. "We're gonna get

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there *soon enough*. And you know, even He didn't exactly race up Golgotha."

Deaf to the connotative and allusive significance in his words, I was busy planning my entrance speech, which began something like, "I'm sorry to have outdistanced my Texas escort, Your Sublime Excellency, but such was my eagerness and such their excess of adipose tissue — well, one must admit, Prexy, that some of them sweat a mite easy. I submit in all humility that at least the Texas Rangers ought to keep in a little better physical trim. Of course with someone as courtly and delicate as Governor Lamar . . ."

I was darkly pleased to note that there were no longer footsteps behind us, even distant ones. The three of us were entering the shadow of the manse now. And as we passed under the great archway with its ghostly bas-reliefs of guns, snorting horses, dead Indians and the like, even Fanninowicz began to fall back, was gone.

Elmo panted, "One thing I want to tell you, Scully, and I really mean it this time, you're a true Texan of the Raven-Alama breed. I'm proud to have known you." He grasped my hand with such obvious spontaneity and sincerity that I had no impulse to strike it aside. Then he too was gone.

I took two furious strides more, then began to slow down halfway through the third. My brain was starting to work again, just a corner of it.

Two scarlet beams sprang from the dark grounds, zizzling past me to either side. I smelt the reek of ions. I heard spluttering, crackling splashes behind me.

Turning, I saw the two laser beams scattering gouts of white-hot molten stone from the bases of the triumphal arch. Dimly I saw Fanninowicz rolling away, wrapped by his wires, behind the shelter of the pale wall. At least he had temporarily escaped the laser's light-stiletto. Of Elmo I saw no sign.

Then from corners of the manse and grounds a dozen lights blazed on me — white lights so bright and hot I thought for a moment I was being disintegrated. If I hadn't had practice from childhood in avoiding looking directly at spotlights I'd have been blinded.

The lights didn't reveal a fairyland, unless you count toy soldiers four and a half feet high as such.

The grounds were crowded with the shielded emplacements of laser- and lightning-guns and other heavy weaponry. They were manned by barefoot Mexicans

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wearing brass cuirasses and brass helmets with colorful horsehair plumes. And all the guns were pointed straight at me.

The natural thing, especially for me, would have been to run like Hell. It was pure rage that held me titanium-rooted — rage at Lamar and the rest for having maneuvered me into this sitting-duck position, for using me as some sort of stalking horse in their war against President Austin, rage at myself for having dismissed them as bumblers and letting them convince me so easily of the untruth of Elmo's earlier tales.

I'd be damned if I'd let those bulky bastards — by now all safely crouched in the outside trenches, *their* trenches — see me run.

And still I wasn't shot down, though both Elmo and Fanninowicz had been fired on. Like their guns, the Mexican soldiers were staring wide-eyed at me — my tall and thin black form, my doubtless dazzling exoskeleton.

It was then I got the glimmer of inspiration and acted on it instantly. Raising my arms wide and high, so that all of my cloak was thrown back and my exoskeleton completely in view, I thundered at my loudest, "I am Death! *Yo soy la Muerta! Soy el Esqueleto!* Vamoose!" Then I brought my arms together and waved them horizontally apart, as if brushing all the brass-armored bent-backs off the stage.

They wavered. One ran. A silver-helmeted officer drew a bead on him with a pistol and was himself zizzlingly transfixed on the red laser beam of one of his own soldiers.

Then they were all in flight, and I was tramping straight forward again, straight up the stairs leading to the spacious porch and the manse's double doors. These slowly opened outward at my approach, revealing that they were backed by great thicknesses of steel.

I faced another curve of muzzles and of silver-armored, staring, bent-back soldiery. I scattered them as I had those outside and I followed them, still at my remorseless steady stride. I was beginning thoroughly to enjoy my role of Death, the Disperser of Armies. Then I realized I was doing exactly what Lamar and Company had wanted me to, winning them a bloodless battle. Even that didn't at once destroy my delight.

Then I saw ahead of me a semicircle of glass cases ten feet high. There were at least twenty of them.

I halted. Striking with all his fabled cunning and genius for the unexpected, Death had after a fashion stopped *me*.

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Each of the cases contained a life-size human figure in natural flesh tones and with Terran clothing that ranged in style over the last 150 years. The earliest or oldest were about six feet tall. Then as the eye ranged around the semicircle, they grew in height to eight feet and more.

I recognized the Americans Kennedy and Johnson from my history prints. I realized I was looking at the presidents of Texas.

They looked grimly back at me — some old, some middle-aged, some almost young. There were handsome faces, harsh faces, faces jowled and tiny-eyed with dissipation and greed.

In the dimness they seemed alive. I felt sure the earliest were wax. I was not so sure about the latter. I recalled how the early Russians had mummified the bodies, or at least stuffed the hides of their early illustrious dead.

Then I heard a rasping voice and looked up.

Four or five stories above me was a magnificent domed skylight of stained glass, made darkly colorful by the moonlight it transmitted. Curving down from beneath it in a wide and graceful spiral came a stairway railed with dark, delicate metal tracery. Here at least was a glimpse of fairyland.

And also an ogre from same. An ogre from whose quilted bathrobe a jowled and purplish face protruded, inset with pig eyes and topped by tousled white hair and wearing askew a golden wreath. He leaned over the stair railing about a floor and a half above me, cradling in one be-blanketed arm an antique double-barreled shotgun.

"Whar are my Mexican houseboys?" he roared. "Whar are you, you little skunks? They's an attack? Shoot down every Ranger or other rebellious bein' sets foot inside mah walls! Get the man with the base bullhorn! Whar's my praetorian guard? Sound the trumpet! Ah, thar's one of the assassins sent against me, skinny bastard in a black minji suit, but it don't hide him from mah all-seein' eyes!"

I lunged rapidly sideways under the stairs. The parquetted spot on which I'd been standing was blasted. Two ricochets stung my forehead and side while at least one more *plinked* off my exoskeleton. A glass case rang.

I raced toward the back of the manse, taking the avenue of retreat the silver-cuirassed Mexicans had used. Soon I had plunged into a dark, rather narrow, blessedly protective corridor. Behind me, President Austin's voice ranted, "Dead as a doornail, dead! Come on, you traitors all and

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taste the Old Man's wrath. Sound the alarum bell!"

Then a younger voice cut in. "There he is! Burn him down! But don't spoil his face! Get the other!"

There was another shotgun blast, a scream, then even my corridor was red as Hell with leaked laser light — just in time to show me, before collision did, that the corridor abruptly changed from a height of about fourteen feet to four and a half. The head space carried a moral so simple and carved so large that I had read it before the red light faded:

WATCH OUT,
ANYONE WHO'S TALL!

MEXES, AREN'T YOU
GLAD YOU'RE SMALL?

I was on my hands and exo-knees as fast as I could fall and scuttling forward. True, the "Get the other!" might not mean me, and even if it did, the "get" might not mean "burn down," but then again it might — and I had already in the past two minutes learned something of Texas political acumen.

I heard a dull crash behind — Austin's body falling? Don't ask useless questions. Crawl faster, you idiot Thin!

I do not know how long my quadruped scramble through the darkness lasted, surely much less time than it seemed then. I do know that I made an even number of right-angle turns and, by exercising choice at forks, managed to make as many left- as right-hand turns, ensuring that I was headed at the end in the same direction I had been at the beginning. Twice I half crawled, half tumbled down short stairs and once climbed up. More than once I gave thanks to Diana that my hands were horny palmed, that knee-plates covered my knee-caps and that my motors kept purring happily. I thanked her too that I had practiced crawling as well as walking, up in the centrifuge. I also gained a certain respect for the maze-running abilities of the Mexicans, who, surely often carrying trays of drinks and food, had presumably regularly treaded these inky corridors in the manse of the light-penurious Austin. Or had they used flashlights? Somehow that seemed unlikely, but I wished I had one now.

From time to time an action-insulated corner of my mind thought thoughts: such as that the morale of the Rangers must be zero that they hadn't overwhelmed the manse by themselves, but waited for the accident of my aid. But maybe it had been

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essential to keep the political war secret and not destroy this Texas White House.

As I right-angled right after a particularly long stretch of Mexican corridor, I heard a thumping scuttling behind me. A thin blue beam narrowly missed my withdrawing foot, and there was the faint smell of singed plastic where it struck the wall.

A voice rebuked, "Cut your power, you dumb-headed lightning plumber! Order is to paralyze him, not fry him — 'less we have to."

I was not greatly reassured.

Thereafter I kept hearing the sounds of my pursuit. It did not gain on me. I was grimly pleased that my motored titanium was performing as well as their flesh.

Suddenly the ceiling rose. I was in a large room dimly lit by moonlight coming through windows and open Texan and Mexican doors. Food-smell and round hanging shapes suggested a kitchen. I lifted to my feet, feeling a surge of dizziness and weakness, but I mastered them, tonguing down pills and water. I made for the Texan door in great strides, crashing down pots and cutlery. I heard angry calls from the crawl space behind, but I was out of line with it.

I stepped outside. I was on a narrow porch and at the head of a steep flight of stairs. I heard an equine snort and a low chilling laugh — and I stopped.

A few yards beyond the foot of the stairs stood a huge white horse with black harness and silver-looking bit and harness rings. Astride it was a figure all in black, from under whose black slouch hat silvery hair cascaded.

Then Rachel Vachel's face lifted out of shadow and in a blur of movement her black-gauntleted hands drew lightning pistols from the black holsters at her side and directed them toward me.

I had never faced, it seemed to me, anything icy as their needle muzzles and her gaze. Of course, I told myself bitterly, she had been in on my betrayal from the start, casually using her seemingly naive wiles to brainwash me and soften me up for her father. I ought to have known you couldn't ever trust a society pinko. I tasted bitterness, and not only from an antigrav pill that had been slow in going down.

I heard rapid steps behind me — two sets of them — and cries of, "There's the black bastard!" "We got him! — don't move a muscle, Skinny!" My arms were grasped from behind, and a sharp muzzle pressed against my temple.

Then with only the faintest whisper of ionization and only its most ghostly acid perfume, two tenuous needle-beams sprang

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from the tips of Rachel Vachel's pistols and bypassed my cheeks inches to either side.

The grip on my arms relaxed: the muzzle ceased to prick my temple, and there were soft yet ponderous thuds on the porch to either side of me.

"Greetings, Captain Skull," she called up to me. "Now hustle down fast and hop up behind me. Those two Rangers are out for a half hour, but even with the morons opposing us, it's a sin to waste time."

Suppressing surprise and other emotions for the moment, I took the stairs two steps at a time, watching my feet narrowly, but calling back, "You mean we can escape? The Rangers haven't the manse encircled?"

"Hell, no. Like all Texas wars, this little scuffle's been all false front. Kick up your leg now and give a jump with the other. I'll yank your shoulder."

"But Rachel," I asked as I complied and found myself astride quivering horseflesh and my exosternum pressed to girl, "How did you know you'd find me here? How did you guess your father would use me to —"

"Easy as guessin' a rat'll bite," she answered scornfully. "Now wrap your arms around me. All you got to do is figure out the sneakiest, safest course, and you

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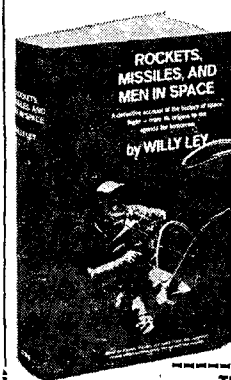

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got Daddy's mind read to the base of his spinal cord. See, I even stole your luggage and got it at my saddlebow. How's that for service?"

She turned in her saddle. Her pale, thinly smiling face was close to mine. "Now confess, Scully," she said. "Aren't you just a mite surprised to discover that the silly little theater gal and giggly Governor's daughter is in actuality Our Lady of Sudden Death, the Black Madonna of the Bent-Back Underground?"

"Well, yes," I said truthfully. "I mean no . . ."

She gave another of her chilling laughs. "You menfolk —" she began. Then her eyes, scanning my forehead, showed sudden concern. "You're hurt, my lover."

Evidently the shotgun ricochet had drawn blood. "It's nothing," I told her.

"It had better be," she told me seriously, "because you got a lot more to do tonight. Pull your cloak and hood around you, your bones gleam too bright. And hang on tight now," she added, turning front again and picking up the reins. "Oh you can feel me up a bit if you get the chance — wow, your skeleton's still like ice. But hang on for your life — because it's a far greater cause than even my lover's precious existence that's now at stake!"

She touched with her heels the great white beast's flanks, and we were soon going through tree shadows and silvery spaces at a ponderous gallop, which caused me to jounce considerably and not only lock my arms hand to elbow around her waist, but also steady my flapping legs by clenching them against the great heaving white barrel below me. In my brain there had gathered a certain bewilderment.

"Where are we going?" I asked innocently.

She replied, "To the central point of tonight's riotous revolutionary assembly, which happens to be the bandstand corner of the Greasertown cemetery."

We galloped on through the moonlit night, my mind now truly a welter of confusion.

TO BE CONTINUED

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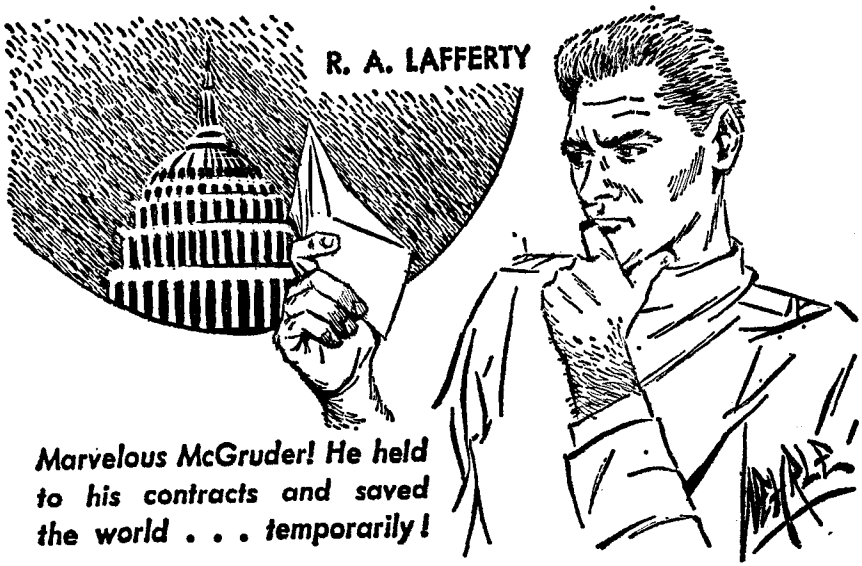
McGruder's Marvels

R. A. LAFFERTY



Marvelous McGruder! He held to his contracts and saved the world . . . temporarily!

There were four bids, and there should have been only three. Only three firms in the country were capable of making so miniaturized a control station.

Three bids were in quite heavy packets. The fourth was in a slim envelope. This was Opening INV-3MINCON3999.

"Ah, here are the bids from Micro Machinists Amalgamated, from Intensive Instrumentation, and from DOW-MEC-TEC," said Colonel Ludenschlager. "It isn't likely that any of them will be less than two years, and we need it within two weeks. We are whipped before we start!" He struck the table with a ringing thud. "But what is the anomalous intrusion, the small envelope bid, Dinneen?"

"It's from an M. M. McGruder," said Colonel Dinneen. "The second M is in quotation marks. We may have a case for the prosecution here. The Joker Act was set up for just such stuff as this. There has to be a ceiling put on cranks."

"There was a certain McGruder in Manhattan when I was a boy," Colonel Schachmeister smiled. "I spent many pleasant moments in

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his, ah, Hippodrome, I believe he called it. It was a narrow place off a narrow cigar store, and only about three could get in it at one time, if they were small, and we were. Best show I ever saw for a dime, though. What is the address of this one?"

"Here in D. C.," said Dinneen. "It would be a rundown address even without the ending 'Apt. 3, room 4-E, use cellar steps off small alley.' Some address! And the phone number of the Rowdy-Dow Bar and Grill is given. It's written in an old and probably insane hand. We will prosecute with compassion, possibly."

The chime chimed for 9:30. It was opening time. And they opened the bids.

They quickly made the basic resume:

1. Micro Machinists Amalgamated. Basic Module: $2,106,740-.00. Estimated Time: 25 months. Exceptions and Alternatives: 256 (detailed). Follow-up Units: $260,000.00 ea. Estimated Time: 30 days each for first 6, grading down to 21 days each for additional.

2. Intensive Instrumentation. Basic Module: $2,004,000.00. Estimated Time: 721 days. Exceptions and Alternatives: 228 (detailed). Follow-Up Units: $248,-000.00 ea. Estimated Time: 28 days each for first 4, 19 days each for additional.

3. Dow-Mec-Tec. Basic Module: $1,999,999.98. Estimated Time: 23 months. Exceptions and Alternatives: 204 (detailed). Follow-Up Units: $235,000.00 Estimated Time: 21 days each for first 9, 16 days each for additional.

4. M. 'M.' McGruder. Basic Module: $24.00. Estimated Time: 24 hours. Exceptions and Alternatives: none (undetailed). Follow-Up Units: $24.00 ea. Estimated Time: 24 hours each — "this keeps going on as long as I live or as long as you buy them, whichever is first. Note: Got one made already. Come try it. I need the $24.00. I don't see how anybody can make them cheaper than this."

"We run into the impossible," said Ludenschlager sadly. "We need one within two weeks or we may as well forget the program. And if we forget the program, we may as well forget everything. It is not for personal aggrandizement that we seek this (except for Dinneen a little), but for the good of our country and the world. There has to be a way out of this delay."

"How about McGruder?" Schachmeister laughed sourly.

"Oh, we'll prosecute him under the Joker Act, of course," Ludenschlager growled, "but now we have the taller thing to tackle. We have to find the way. Two years

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will be too late; we'll be done for by then. Two weeks will almost be too late. We must somehow break the time barrier in this."

"We're whipped, we're whipped!" Dinneen wailed, "and our enemies will rejoice over us." He turned on three toes and strode gloomily out of the room.

"The Covenant," it said. "Large, hard-roasted, de-oiled, white peanuts under the Goober John trade name. Three a day, and they must be Goober John Number Ones. Failure to provide them will void the Covenant."

"There will be no failure," said Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder. "It shall be done."

"We like-stuff pledge fulfill the Covenant," it said.

The micro-miniaturized control station, the "bullet brain," had to handle thirteen data flows at once. It had to do other things, including the monitoring and inhibiting of the world. It must be practically indestructible. And it had to be about the size of an eraser on a pencil. This small size was of the greatest importance.

The smallest model of this which would handle such data properly was about a cubic meter, and it weighed a thousand kilograms. And it was itself a miniaturization.

The project is still classified, so we cannot in conscience give deep details of it. The project is still active, and perhaps an answer can be found for it this second time. Ah well, we lost the first race, and the most populous one-third of our nation; but we lost it hard. We had them near beaten for a little while there. Another year, and DOW-MEC-TEC will have their first module ready. It will probably be far too late, it will likely do no good at all, but you never know. The slimmest hope still remains . . .

But now they were looking very hard for that answer the first time: the three colonels, the High Commission of the colonels, the potential saviors of their country and the world. It was not for personal glory they sought this (except Dinneen a little) but for the ultimate good of the ultimate number.

Colonel Dinneen strode up and down endless corridors, booming like a canary in his odd voice. He didn't want the thing in two years, he wanted it in two minutes, right now.

Colonel Ludenschlager shuffled old brain-buster notes looking for a miracle. He had an impediment there; he didn't believe in miracles.

Colonel Schachmeister walked desolately through the city, praying for the instant miniaturized

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control station. He walked and walked; but where did he walk?

"It is my unconscious leading me somewhere," he mumbled. "And I will follow my unconscious wherever it leads, like a man in a dream."

That Schachmeister was an unconscious phony. It wasn't his unconscious leading him anywhere! It was his conniving own self walking furtively where his own dishonesty would not allow him to walk openly. And he had that address graven on his brain by a micro-stylus.

There was something about a three-foot-wide Hippodrome from his boyhood; there was something of the credence in the incredible: and both these things were shameful to him as a man of science, and a colonel moreover.

Well, it was a shabby enough neighborhood. The alley was worse, and yet even this was not the final alley. He found it then, the "small alley," hardly a skunk track. He followed it. He knocked crunchingly on a door and near lost his hand in the termite-eaten wood.

"Be careful there!" an ancient voice blatted out like slats falling down in an old bed. "Those are friends of my own people, and my people will not have them discommoded. After all, they are quiet, they do no harm, and they eat only wood."

"It — it's the same McGruder! It is Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder himself, the Grand Master of McGruder's Marvels!" Colonel Schachmeister detonated in wonder.

"Oh sure, little boy," came the wonderful voice like an old organ filling with noise again and blowing the dust off itself in doing so. "And it's the same little Heinie Schachmeister! Why aren't you in school today, Heinie? Oh, I notice that you have grown, and perhaps you are too old for school now."

"It's marvelous to see you again, Marvelous!" Schachmeister breathed in awe. "I had no idea that you were the same one, or that you were still alive."

"Come in, little Heinie. And what are you doing? I have never seen your name in the Flea-Bag, so I suppose you have failed in your early ambition."

"Ah, McGruder, I don't know what the Flea-Bag is, and I forget what early ambition of mine you refer to."

"The Flea-Bag, Heinie, is a mimeographed sheet that still circulates among the members of our dwindling profession. And your early ambition was to grow up and have fleas of your own."

"Wish I had done it, McGruder, wish I had done it, especially on days like this. Some of my happiest hours were spent watching

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McGruder's Marvels, that greatest of all Flea Circuses, in that little hole in the wall."

"In the Hippodrome, you mean, Heinie? Do you remember the Coachman Set?"

"Yes, yes, and the flea up on the coachman's seat, in livery, and with the whip! McGruder, when you screwed the three sections of the microscope together, you could see the very braiding of that coachman's whip. And the flea in harness! The harness was perfect, and had little bells on it. The bells had clappers, and you could hear them jingle when you screwed that little thing into your ear. And the flea in harness was shod, with real horse-shoes, or flea-shoes."

"More, Heinie, more! The shoes had authentic calks on them, and nails! And the nails were of no ordinary sort, but were ancient horseshoe nails with the oblong wedge-shaped heads. You could see that when you screwed the fourth section into the microscope. And you remember the lady fleas inside the coach, Heinie?"

"Yes, yes, dressed in old Empire style with the high hair on them, and the flounce stuff. And when you screwed the little thing into your nose you could smell their perfume. What was it, McGruder?"

"*Printemps*. And you may not know it, but there were eight petticoats on each of those lady fleas, and the microscope lace on even the inmost of them was done with loving care and surpassing detail, more than nine hundred loops on the bottom round in the style that is called *punto a groppo*. Your eyes used to boggle at my things, little Heinie."

"My mind boggles at something now. That was forty years ago. McGruder, I know you were good, but this passes reason! You still have your little lathes and turners and instruments here, but you did not make a miniaturized control station with such!"

"Of course not, Heinie. The detailing for the little control station had to be a thousand times finer, actually eight thousand times finer, than anything I could do on my own little lathes. I'm surprised you should ask such a silly question, Heinie."

"Is that the control station there, Marvelous?"

"That's it, Heinie. Take it along and try it and send me the twenty-four dollars if it works. I'll have another one this time tomorrow if you wish. It's nice to have seen you. I'm always happy when the little boys come back to see me again."

The Marvelous McGruder still had a certain threadbare elegance about him.

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"McGruder, how did you make the control station?"

"Trade secret, Heinie. You remember my patter. Everything was always a trade secret."

"McGruder, I'm going to ask you the silliest question I've ever asked anyone in my life. Did your fleas, somehow, manufacture that thing?"

"Certainly not, Heinie! What's the matter with you anyhow? What do they make the colonels out of nowadays? No wonder we're in trouble! You know how hard it is to get fleas to wear clothes for even a few seconds? You know how hard it is to teach them even the most simple trick? Heinie, fleas are stupid, and so are you! No, I will settle that. Fleas did not, in any way at all, have anything to do with making that miniature control station. I didn't have much to do with it myself. Subcontracted it, really. No, I will not give you any more information about it. Take it and try it. Bring me the twenty-four dollars if you are satisfied. And now you had better get along or your *keiferin* of a mother will be after me for letting you loiter so long in my place. Oh, I forgot! You're a big boy now."

Colonel Schachmeister left the shabby elegant old man, Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder; and he took the miniaturized control station along with him.

He took it to a most secret laboratory to try it with his peers.

It worked.

"The Covenant," it said. "There are only twenty-seven Goober John Number One peanuts left here. These will last only nine days. Replenish the stock, McGruder, or the Covenant is in danger."

"I'll remember to get a package of them at the Rawdy-Dow today," McGruder promised.

Well, there were thirty of the "bullet brains" in operation now, and our enemies could no longer rejoice over us. Their own spectacular stunt had been inhibited; their own dastardly program had been paralyzed. With another thirty of the "bullet brains" in operation, the High Commission of the colonels, the Secret Saviors of the World, would be able to inhibit anything anywhere in that world.

It was of most amazing and curious effect that such small things could do such; and the secret of it was in their very smallness. Now, the manner by which they did this — No! No! No! We may not tell it! It is more than classified; it is totally under the ban. It is still possible that the thing may be done once more; still possible that it may yet save what is left of us.

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But it was going well for the colonels in that time. And yet they wanted them faster than one a day.

"We have no desire for personal gain or glory," said Dinneen, "except myself a little. But if that crazy old man can make one a day, it should be possible for us to make a thousand. Go back to him, Schachmeister. Find out how he does it. We have spied on him, of course, but we can't understand it at all. The control stations seem to form themselves on his table there. They continue to take form even while he is asleep. And there's a further mystery. He never checked out prints of the larger model that was to be miniaturized. *What does he work from?*"

"Is it true, Schachmeister, that he once operated a flea circus in New York?" Ludenschlager asked.

"Yes, it's true enough. He's the same man."

"Can there be some possible connection? No, no, don't laugh! It cannot be any sillier than what is already happening."

"No, men, there isn't a connection. He said to me, and he was speaking the truth, that fleas did not, in any way, have anything to do with the control stations. And, yet, I remember an ugly smear against McGruder from the early years —"

"What is that, Schachmeister?" Dinneen demanded avidly.

"That he sometimes used mechanical fleas. I did not believe it."

"Go to him, Schachmeister," Dinneen and Ludenschlager both begged. "If you cannot find out how he makes them, at least ask if he cannot make them faster."

"The Covenant," it said. "There are only three Goober Number One peanuts left here. Replenish the stock, McGruder, or the Covenant will come to an end this very day. I'd get you an extension for the affection I have for you, but the numerous members of the smaller orders will not hear of it. There are seven orders, as you know, each smaller than the other. Sometimes they are hard to deal with, particularly the four smaller orders which I cannot see myself. Today, McGruder, Goober Johns!"

"I swear I will remember it," McGruder swore. "I'll get a package at the Rowdy-Dow this very afternoon."

Colonel Schachmeister went back to see Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder. McGruder was no longer shabby. He was the cream of old con men with an ivory-colored topper and canary-colored vest and gloves. He ges-

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tured with a silver-headed cane. He welcomed Heinie Schachmeister with incredible flourish, and Schachmeister came right to the point.

"Will you not tell me how you make the stations, Marvelous? It is important."

"No. I will not tell you. It is important, to me, that I slice up this fat hog for myself, and twenty-four dollar slices please me mightily."

"Marvelous, you did not check out a set of plans for this thing. From what do you miniaturize?"

"Well, I was going to, Heinie. I went by the place where the plans were to be had. But I found that the prints for that gadget weighed four hundred pounds, and also that I would have to put down a token deposit of $50,000.00 to check out a set of them. Both these things were too heavy for me. So I slipped a few of my small associates into a packet of plans (I always was a tricky man with my hands, you know), and they recorded the information in their own way."

"Your small associates — ah — how long did it take them to record the plans?"

"About as long as it took me to light a cigar."

"And how many of these associates were there?"

"Don't know, Heinie. They were sixth and seventh order associates, so there must have been quite a few of them."

"What do they look like, McGruder?"

"Don't know. I've never seen them. I can see only the first order ones, and the second order ones through a strong microscope. And each order can see only two orders smaller than itself, by using extreme magnification."

"They are not fleas?"

"Of course not, Heinie! What's the matter with you?"

"Are they mechanical?"

"No, not mechanical. But they are mechanically inclined, in the smaller orders of them."

"How did you become — ah — associated with them, Marvelous?"

"One of the first order ones was a friend of a flea who once worked with me. The flea introduced us, and we rather took to each other. We both know how to latch onto a good thing when we see it."

"Marvelous, would it be possible to make more than one control station a day."

"Sure. I just didn't want to milk it dry too soon. Get you a dozen a day, if you want them. All it'll take is a bigger sack of peanuts."

"McGruder! Did I hear you right?"

"I don't know what you heard,

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Heinie. I said that all it would take would be a bigger sack of peanuts. I'll have twelve of the controls for you tomorrow, but there's no discount for quantity. I stick by my bid. Twenty-four dollars each."

"Marvelous, Marvelous, this is marvelous!" Colonel Schachmeister gibbered, and he rattled away from there to bring the glad news to his associates.

"This puts us over the hump! Two days and we will have the world by its woolly tail!" Colonel Dinneen clattered. "We will have sufficient coverage now to impose our will on all nations. For their own good, we will compel them away from their errors."

"We have no thought of personal benefit," Colonel Ludenschlager exploded with a jingling hiss, "except Colonel Dinneen a little. We will force-feed the world on all benignity and kindness and understanding and good will. We will teach the world true happiness and order, now that we will have the power to do so."

"We be the lords of the world now," cried Colonel Schachmeister, "the High Commission of Colonels, saviors of the country and the world. The President will be glad to shine our very shoes; it will teach him blessed humility. We will shape the whole world like clay in our hands. We will run the world now, and all must come down to our spring to drink. Ah, but the water is sweet, and the people will come to love it!"

The Greeks named it *hybris*. And in the Ozarks they call it Peacock Fever. It was Pride. It was the Grand Arrogance, the Warrentless Assumption, the bursting summertime of Giant Pride. And it would have its fall.

"*The Covenant!*" it thundered like acorns rattling on the roof, and McGruder almost didn't need the piece screwed into his ear to hear it. "*These aren't Goober John Number Ones!*"

"Ah, they were out of Goober Johns at the Rowdy-Dow," the Marvelous McGruder soothed. "These are Arizona Spanish Peanuts packaged by the Snack-Sack people. Try them. They're even better than Goober Johns."

"The Covenant is voided!" it said sadly. "The involvement with humanity is ended."

And Malcomb 'the Marvelous' McGruder was never able to establish contact with any of them again; so that, instead of twelve of them that day, there were no control stations at all for evermore. And those already in use blinked out.

"McGruder, hey McGruder!" Colonel Schachmeister came to him.

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"Ah, little Heinie, why are you not in school this day? Oh, I forget always, you are a big boy now. It is all ended, Heinie, all ended. The twenty-four dollars a day and everything is gone. I will have to live by my wits again, and I always hate to get off a comfortable con that has kept me."

"McGruder," the frantic Colonel Schachmeister moaned, "it isn't merely that there will be no more of the stations, it is that those already in service have gone dead or disappeared also. This is not possible. They were made to operate forever."

"Don't think so, Heinie, not after the Covenant was broken. I think that the guys in them quit when they heard about the wrong peanuts."

"What guys? What peanuts? We've lost the jump on them, McGruder. A third of our country will be gone before we can institute a holding action, without the miniature stations. What made them go dead, McGruder?"

"I figure it all out now, Heinie. They didn't make any little control stations at all. They took all of us in. They didn't any more know how to make little control stations than I did, but they were smart enough to fake it and make them work. I tell you a thing, Heinie, and you write it down so you remember it when you get big: *never trust a bug you can't see.*"

"But they worked, Marvelous! They worked perfectly till they went dead or disappeared. They handled all the data flows perfectly. They responded, they monitored, they inhibited. Certainly they were control stations."

"Not really, Heinie. Hey, this old town will be gone in another five minutes, won't it! I bet that one took out thirty square blocks. Man, feel the hot blast from it even here. Your sleeve's on fire, Heinie. Your mother will scold and moan when she sees how it's burned. See, this is the way it was — You know the man who made all the fancy little cars so cheap, and nobody knew how he did it?"

"No, no, McGruder, what is it? Oh, the asphalt is flowing like water in the streets! What do you mean?"

"A guy that bought one of those little cars lifted up the hood one day. It didn't have a motor in it. It didn't have any works at all in it. It's the same as these little control stations were. It just had a little guy in there pedaling the pedals to make it go. Now they quit pedaling, Heinie.

— R. A. LAFFERTY

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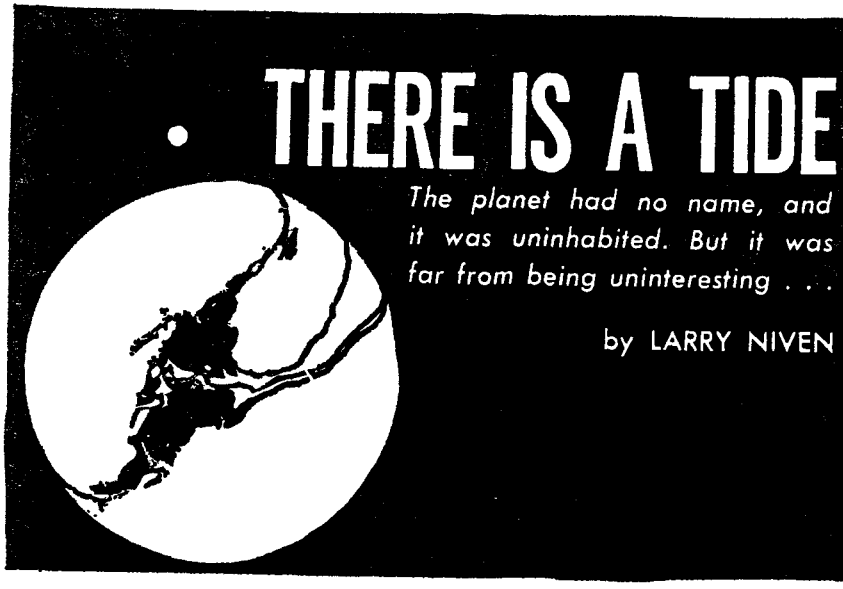

THERE IS A TIDE

The planet had no name, and it was uninhabited. But it was far from being uninteresting . . .

by LARRY NIVEN

I

Then, the planet had no name. It circles a star which in 2830 lay beyond the fringe of known space, a distance of nearly forty light-years from Sol. The star is a K9, somewhat redder than Sol, somewhat smaller. The planet, swinging eighty million miles from its primary in a reasonably circular orbit, is a trifle cold for human tastes.

In the year 2830 one Louis Gridley Wu happened to be passing. The emphasis on accident is intended. In a universe the size of ours almost anything that can happen, will. Take the coincidence of his meeting —

But we'll get to that.

Louis Wu was one hundred and eighty years old. As a regular user of boosterspice, he didn't show his years. If he didn't get bored first, or broke, he might reach a thousand.

"But," he sometimes told himself, "not if I have to put up with any more cocktail parties, or bandersnatch hunts, or painted flatlanders swarming through an anarchy park too small for them by a factor of ten. Not if I have to live through another one-night love affair or another twenty-year

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marriage or another twenty-minute wait for a transfer booth that blows its zap just as it's my turn. And people. Not if I have to live with people, day and night, all those endless centuries."

When he started to feel like that, he left. It had happened three times in his life, and now a fourth. Presumably it would keep happening. In such a state of anomia, of acute anti-everything, he was no good to anyone, especially his friends, most especially himself. So he left. In a small but adequate spacecraft, his own, he left everything and everyone, heading outward for the fringe of known space. He would not return until he was desperate for the sight of a human face, the sound of a human voice.

On the second trip he had gritted his teeth and waited until he was desperate for the sight of a *kzinti* face.

That was a long trip, he remembered. And, because he had only been three and a half months in space on this fourth trip, and because his teeth still snapped together at the mere memory of a certain human voice . . . because of these things, he added, "I think this time I'll wait till I'm desperate to see a kdatlyno. Female, of course."

Few of his friends guessed the wear and tear these trips saved him. And them.

He spent the months reading, while his library played orchestrated music. By now he was well clear of known space. Now he turned the ship ninety degrees, beginning a wide circular arc with Sol at the center.

He approached a certain K9 star. He dropped out of hyperdrive well clear of the singularity in hyperspace which surrounds any large mass. He accelerated into the system on his main thruster, sweeping the space ahead of him with the deep-radar. He was not looking for habitable planets. He was looking for Slaver stasis boxes.

If the hyperwave pulse returned no echo, he would accelerate until he passed the star, and keep accelerating until he could shift to hyperdrive. The velocity would stay with him, and he could use it to coast through the next system he tried, and the next, and the next. It saved fuel.

He had never found a Slaver stasis box. It did not stop him from looking.

As he passed through the system, the deep-radar showed him planets like pale ghosts, light gray circles on the white screen. The K9 sun was a wide gray disk, darkening almost to black at the center. The near-black was degenerate matter, compressed past the point where electron orbits collapse entirely.

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He was well past the K9 sun, and still accelerating, when the screen showed a tiny black fleck.

"No system is perfect, of course," he muttered as he turned off the drive. He talked to himself a good deal, out here where nobody could interrupt him.

"It *usually* saves fuel," he told himself a week later. By then he was out of the singularity in clear space. He took the ship into hyperdrive, circled halfway round the system, and began decelerating. The velocity he'd built up during those first two weeks gradually left him. Somewhere near where he'd found a black speck in the deep-radar projection, he slowed to a stop.

Though he had never realized it until now, his system for saving fuel was based on the assumption that he would never find a Slaver box. But the fleck was there again, a black dot on the gray ghost of a planet. Louis Wu moved in.

The world looked something like Earth. It was nearly the same size, very much the same shape, somewhat the same color. There was no moon.

Louis used his telescope on the planet and whistled appreciatively. Shredded white cloud over misty blue . . . faint continental outlines . . . a hurricane whorl near the equator. The ice caps looked big, but there would be warm climate near the equator. The air looked sweet and noncarcinogenic on the spectrograph. And nobody on it! Not a soul!

No next door neighbors. No Voices. No faces.

"What the hell," he chortled. "I've got my box. I'll just spend the rest of my vacation here. No men. No women. No children." He frowned and rubbed the fringe of hair along his jaw. "Am I being hasty? Maybe I should knock."

But he scanned the radio bands and got nothing. Any civilized planet radiates like a small star in the radio range. Moreover, there was no sign of civilization, even from a hundred miles up.

"Great! Okay, first I'll get that old stasis box —" He was sure it was that. Nothing but stars and stasis boxes were dense enough to show black in the reflection of a hyperwave pulse.

He followed the image around the bulge of the planet. It seemed the planet had a moon after all. The moon was twelve hundred miles up, and it was ten feet across.

"Now why," he wondered aloud, "would the Slavers have put it in orbit? It's too easy to find. They were in a war, for Finagle's sake! And why would it stay here?"

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The little moon was still a couple of thousand miles away, invisible to the naked eye. The scope showed it clearly enough. A silver sphere ten feet through, with no marks on it.

"A billion and a half years it's been there," said Louis to himself, said he. "And if you'll believe that, you'll believe anything. *Something* would have knocked it down. Dust, a meteor, the solar wind. Tnuctip soldiers. A magnetic storm. Nah." He ran his fingers through straight black hair grown too long. "It must have drifted in from somewhere else. Recently. Wha . . ."

Another ship, small and conical, had appeared behind the silvery sphere. Its hull was green, with darker green markings.

II

"Damn," said Louis. He didn't recognize the make. It was no human ship. "Well, it could be worse. They could have been people." He used the com laser.

The other ship braked to a stop. In courtesy, so did Louis.

"Would you *believe* it?" he demanded of himself. "Three *years* total time I've spent looking for stasis boxes. I finally find one, and now something else wants it too!"

The bright blue spark of another laser glowed in the tip of the alien cone. Louis listened to the autopilot-computer chuckling to itself as it tried to untangle the signals in an unknown laser beam. At least they did use lasers, not telepathy or tentacle-waving or rapid changes in skin color.

A face appeared on Louis's screen.

It was not the first alien he had seen. This, like some others, had a recognizable head: a cluster of sense organs grouped around a mouth, with room for a brain. Trinocular vision, he noted: the eyes set deep in sockets, well protected, but restricted in range of vision. Triangular mouth, too, with yellow, serrated bone knives showing their edges behind three gristle lips.

Definitely, this was an unknown species.

"Boy, are you ugly," Louis refrained from saying. The alien's translator might be working by now.

His own autopilot finished translating the alien's first message. It said, "Go away. This object belongs to me."

"Remarkable," Louis sent back. "Are you a Slaver?" The being did not in the least resemble a Slaver.

"That word was not translated," said the alien. "I reached the artifact before you did. I will fight to keep it."

Louis scratched at his chin, at

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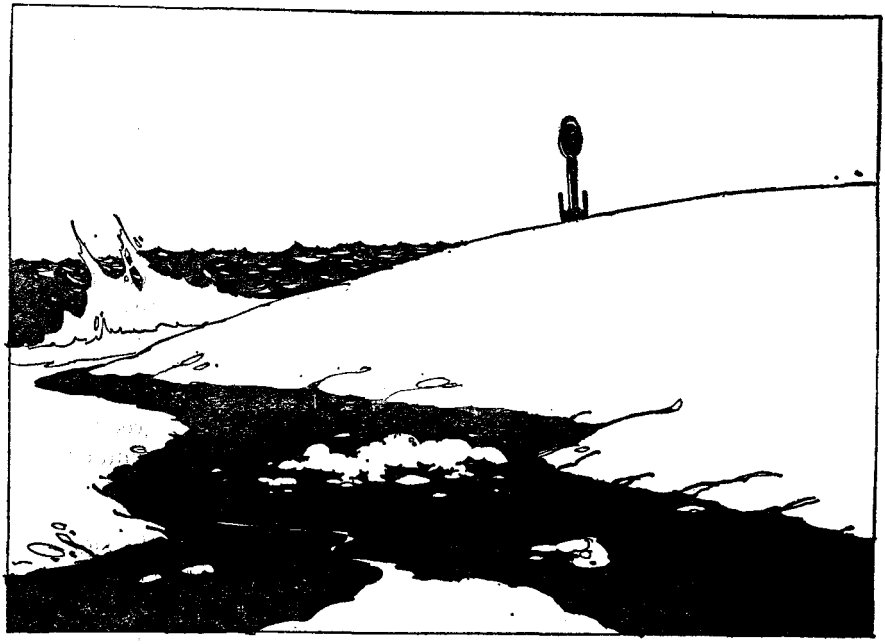

two weeks' growth of bristly beard. His ship had very little to fight with. Even the fusion plant which powered the thruster was designed with safety in mind. A laser battle, fought with com lasers turned to maximum, would be a mere endurance test; and he'd lose, for the alien ship had more mass to absorb more heat. He had no weapons per se. Presumably the alien did.

But the stasis box was a big one.

The tnuctipun-Slaver war had wiped out most of the intelligent species of the galaxy, a billion and a half years ago. Countless minor battles must have occurred before a Slaver-developed final weapon was used. Often the Slavers, losing a battle, had stored valuables in a stasis box, and hidden it against the day they would again be of use.

No time passed inside a closed stasis box. Alien meat a billion and a half years old had emerged still fresh from its hiding place. Weapons and tools showed no trace of rust. Once a stasis box had disgorged a small, tarsierlike sentient being, still alive. That former slave had lived a strange life before the aging process claimed her, the last of her species.

Slaver stasis boxes were beyond value. It was known that the tnuctipun, at least, had known

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the secret of direct conversion of matter. Perhaps their enemies had too. Someday, in a stasis box somewhere outside known space, such a device would be found. Then fusion power would be as obsolete as internal combustion.

And this, a sphere ten feet in diameter, must be the largest stasis box ever found.

"I too will fight to keep the artifact," said Louis. "But consider this. Our species has met once, and will meet again, regardless of who takes the artifact now. We can be friends or enemies. Why should we risk this relationship by killing?"

The alien sense-cluster gave away nothing. "What do you propose?"

"A game of chance, with the risks even on both sides. Do you play games of chance?"

"Emphatically yes. The process of living is a game of chance. To avoid chance is insanity."

"That it is. Hmmm." Louis regarded the alien head that seemed to be all triangles. He saw it abruptly whip around, *flick,* to face straight backward, and snap back in the same instant. The sight did something to the pit of his stomach.

"Did you speak?" the alien asked.

"No. Won't you break your neck that way?"

"Your question is interesting. Later we must discuss anatomy. I have a proposal."

"Fine."

"We shall land on the world below us. We will meet between our ships. I will do you the courtesy of emerging first. Can you bring your translator?"

He could connect the computer with his suit radio. "Yes."

"We will meet between our ships and play some simple game, familiar to neither of us, depending solely on chance. Agreed?"

"Provisionally. What game?"

The image on the screen rippled with diagonal lines. Something interferring with the signal? It cleared quickly. "There is a mathematics game," said the alien. "Our mathematics will certainly be similar."

"True." Though Louis had heard of some decidedly peculiar twists in alien mathematics.

"The game involves a *screee.*" The alien raised a three-clawed hand, holding a lens-shaped object. The alien's mutually opposed fingers turned it so that Louis could see the different markings on each side. "This is a *screee.* You and I will throw it upward six times each. I will choose one of the symbols, you will choose the other. If my symbol falls looking upward more often than yours, the artifact is mine. The risks are even."

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The image rippled, then cleared.

"Agreed," said Louis. He was a bit disappointed in the simplicity of the game.

"We shall both accelerate away from the artifact. Will you follow me down?"

"I will," said Louis.

The image disappeared.

III

Louis Wu scratched at a week's growth of beard. What a way to greet an alien ambassador! In the worlds of men Louis Wu dressed impeccably; but out here he felt free to look like death warmed over, all the time.

But how was a — Trinoc supposed to know that he should have shaved? No, that wasn't the problem.

Was he fool or genius?

He had friends, many of them, with habits like his own. Two had disappeared decades ago; he no longer remembered their names. He remembered only that each had gone hunting stasis boxes in this direction and that each had neglected to come back.

Had they met alien ships?

There were any number of other explanations. Half a year or more spent alone in a singleship was a good way to find out whether you liked yourself. If you decided you didn't, there was no point in returning to the worlds of men.

But there *were* aliens out here. Armed. One rested in orbit five hundred miles ahead of his ship, with a valuable artifact halfway between.

Still, gambling was safer than fighting. Louis Wu waited for the alien's next move.

That move was to drop like a rock. The alien ship must have used at least twenty gees of push. After a moment of shock, Louis followed under the same acceleration, protected by his cabin gravity. Was the alien testing his maneuverability?

Possibly not. He seemed contemptuous of tricks. Louis, trailing the alien at a goodly distance, was now much closer to the silver sphere. Suppose he just turned ship, ran for the artifact, strapped it to his hull and kept running?

Actually, that wouldn't work. He'd have to slow to reach the sphere; the alien wouldn't have to slow to attack. Twenty gees was close to his ship's limit.

Running might not be a bad idea, though. What guarantee had he of the alien's good faith? What if the alien "cheated"?

That risk could be minimized. His pressure suit had sensors to monitor his body functions. Louis set the autopilot to blow the fusion plant if his heart stopped. He rigged a signal button on his suit

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to blow the plant whether his heart failed or not.

The alien ship burned bright orange as it hit air. It fell free and then slowed suddenly a mile over the ocean. "Show-off," Louis muttered and prepared to imitate the maneuver.

The conical ship showed no exhaust. Its drive must be either a reactionless drive, like his own, or a kzin-style induced gravity drive. Both were neat and clean, silent, safe to bystanders and highly advanced.

Islands were scattered across the ocean. The alien circled, chose one at seeming random, and landed like a feather along a bare shoreline.

Louis followed him down. There was a bad moment while he waited for some unimaginable weapon to fire from the grounded ship, to tear him flaming from the sky while his attention was distracted by landing procedures. But he landed without a jar, several hundred yards from the alien cone.

"An explosion will destroy both our ships if I am harmed," he told the alien via signal beam.

"Our species seem to think alike. I will now descend."

Louis watched him appear near the nose of his ship, in a wide circular airlock. He watched the alien drift gently to the sand. Then he clamped his helmet down and entered the airlock.

Had he made the right decision?

Gambling was safer than war. More fun, too. Best of all, it gave him better odds.

"But I'd hate to go home without that box," he said. In nearly two hundred years of life, he had never done anything as important as finding a stasis box. He had made no discoveries, won no elective offices, overthrown no governments, then this was his big chance.

"Even odds," he said, and turned on the intercom as he descended.

His muscles and semicircular canals registered about a gee. A hundred feet away, waves slid hissing up onto pure white sand. The waves were green and huge, perfect for riding; the beach a definite beer party beach.

Later, perhaps he would ride those waves to shore on his belly, if the air checked out and the water was free of predators. He hadn't had time to give the planet a thorough checkup.

Sand tugged at his boots as he went to meet the alien.

The alien was five feet tall. He had looked much taller descending from his ship, but that was because he was mostly leg. More than three feet of skinny leg, a torso like a beer barrel, and no

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neck. Impossible that his neckless neck should be so supple. But the chrome yellow skin fell in thick rolls around the bottom of his head, hiding anatomical details.

His suit was transparent, a roughly alien-shaped balloon, constricted at the shoulder, above and below the complicated elbow joint, at the wrist, at hip and knee. Air jets showed at wrist and ankle. Tools hung in loops at the chest. A back pack hung from the neck, under the suit. Louis noted all these tools with trepidation; any one of them could be a weapon.

"I expected that you would be taller," said the alien.

"A laser screen doesn't tell much, does it? I think my translator may have mixed up right with left, too. Do you have the coin?"

"The *scree*?" The alien produced it. "Shall there be no preliminary talk? My name is *scree*."

"My machine can't translate that. Or pronounce it. My name is Louis. Has your species met others besides mine?"

"Yes, two. But I am not an expert in that field of knowledge."

"Nor am I. Let's leave the politenesses to the experts. We're here to gamble."

"Choose your symbol," said the alien, and handed him the coin.

Louis looked it over. It was a lens of platinum or something similar, sharp-edged, with the three-clawed hand of his new gambling partner on one side and a planet, with heavy ice caps outlined, decorating the other. Maybe they weren't ice caps, but continents.

He held the coin as if trying to choose. Stalling. Those gas jets seemed to be attitude jets, but maybe not. Suppose he won? Would he win only the chance to be murdered?

But they'd both die if his heart stopped. No alien could have guessed what kind of weapon would render him helpless without killing him.

"I choose the planet. You flip first."

The alien tossed the coin in the direction of Louis's ship. Louis's eyes followed it down, and he took two steps to retrieve it. The alien stood beside him when he rose.

"Hand," he said. "My turn." He was one down. He tossed the coin. As it spun, gleaming, he saw for the first time that the alien ship was gone.

"What gives?" he demanded.

"There is no need for us to die," said the alien. It held something that had hung in a loop from its chest. "This is a weapon, but both will die if I use it. Please

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do not try to reach your ship."

Louis touched the button that would blow his power plant.

"My ship lifted when you turned your head to follow the screee. By now my ship is beyond range of any possible explosion you can bring to bear. There is no need for us to die, provided you do not try to reach your ship."

"Wrong. I can leave your ship without a pilot." He left his hand where it was. Rather than be cheated by an alien in a gambling game —

"The pilot is still on board, with the astrogator and the screee. I am only the communications officer. Why did you assume I was alone?"

Louis sighed and let his arm fall. "Because I'm stupid," he said bitterly. "Because you used the singular pronoun, or my computer did. Because I thought you were a gambler."

"I gambled that you would not see my ship take off, that you would be distracted by the coin, that you could see only from the front of your head. The risks seemed better than one-half."

Louis nodded. It all seemed clear.

"There was also the chance that you had lured me down to destroy me." The computer was still translating into first person singular. "I have lost at least

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one exploring ship that flew in this direction."

"Not guilty. So have we." A thought struck him, and he said, "Prove that you hold a weapon."

The alien obliged. No beam showed, but sand exploded to Louis's left, with a vicious *Crack!* and a flash the color of lightning. The alien held something that made holes.

And that was all. Louis bent and picked up the coin. "As long as we're here, shall we finish the game?"

"To what purpose?"

"To see who would have won. Doesn't your species gamble for pleasure?"

"To what purpose? We gamble for survival."

"Then Finagle take your whole breed!" he snarled and flung himself to the sand. His chance for glory was gone, tricked away from him. *There is a tide that governs men's affairs . . .* and there went the ebb, carrying statues to Louis Wu, history books naming Louis Wu, jetsam on the tide.

"Your attitude is puzzling. One gambles only when gambling is necessary."

"Nuts."

"My translator will not translate that comment."

"Do you know what that artifact is?"

"I know of the species who built that artifact. They traveled far."

"We've never found a stasis box that big. It must be a vault of some kind."

"It is thought that that species used a single weapon to end their war and all its participants."

The two looked at each other. Possibly each was thinking the same thing. *What a disaster, if any but my own species should take this ultimate weapon!*

But that was anthropomorphic thinking. Louis knew that a kzin would have been saying, *Now I can conquer the universe, as is my right.*

"Finagle take my luck!" said Louis Wu between his teeth. "Why did you have to show up at the same time I did?"

"That was not entirely chance. My instruments found your craft as you backed into the system. To reach the vicinity of the artifact in time, it was necessary to use thrust that damaged my ship and killed one of my crew. I earned possession of the artifact."

"By cheating, damn you!" Louis stood up . . . .

And something meshed between his brain and his semicircular canals.

IV

One gravity.

The density of a planet's

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atmosphere depended on its gravity, and on its moon. A big moon would skim away most of the atmosphere, over the billions of years of a world's evolution. A moonless world the size and mass of Earth should have unbreathable air, impossibly dense, worse than Venus.

But this planet had no moon. Except —

The alien said something, a startled ejaculation that the computer refused to translate. "*Scree!* Where did the water go?"

Louis looked. What he saw puzzled him only a moment. The ocean had receded, slipped imperceptibly away, until what showed now was half a mile of level, slickly shining sea bottom.

"Where did the water go? I do not understand."

"I do."

"Where did it go? Without a moon, there can be no tides. Tides are not this quick in any case. Explain, please."

"It'll be easier if we use the telescope in my ship."

"In your ship there may be weapons."

"Now pay attention," said Louis. "Your ship is very close to total destruction. Nothing can save your crew but the com laser in my ship."

The alien dithered, then capitulated. "If you have weapons, you would have used them earlier. You cannot stop my ship now. Let us enter your ship. Remember that I hold my weapon."

The alien stood beside him, his mouth working disturbingly around serrated edges of his teeth as Louis activated the scope and screen. Shortly a starfield appeared, as did a conical spacecraft, painted green with darker green markings. Along the bottom of the screen was the blur of thick atmosphere.

"You see? The artifact must be nearly to the horizon. It moves fast."

"That fact is obvious even to low intelligence."

"Yah. Is it obvious to you that this world must have a massive satellite?"

"But it does not, unless the satellite is invisible."

"Not invisible. Just too small to notice. But then, it must be very dense."

The alien didn't answer.

"Why did we assume the sphere was a Slaver stasis box? Its shape was wrong; its size was wrong. But it was shiny, like the surface of a stasis field, and spherical, like an artifact. Planets are spheres too, but gravity wouldn't ordinarily pull something ten feet wide into a sphere. Either it would have to be very fluid, or it would have to be very dense. Do you understand me?"

"No."

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"I don't know how your equipment works. My deep-radar uses a hyperwave pulse to find stasis boxes. When something stops a hyperwave pulse, it's either a stasis box, or it's denser than degenerate matter, the matter inside a normal star. And *this* object is dense enough to cause tides."

A tiny silver bead had drifted into view ahead of the cone. Telescopic foreshortening seemed to bring it right alongside the ship. Louis reached to scratch at his beard and was stopped by his faceplate.

"I believe I understand you. But how could it happen?"

"That's guesswork. Well?"

"Call my ship. They would be killed."

"I had to be sure you wouldn't stop me." Louis Wu went to work. Presently a light glowed; the computer had found the alien ship with its com laser.

He spoke without preliminaries. "You must leave the spherical object immediately. It is not an artifact. It is ten feet of nearly solid neutronium, probably torn loose from a neutron star."

There was no answer, of course. The alien stood behind him but did not speak. Probably his own ship's computer could not have handled the double translation. But the alien was making one two-armed gesture, over and over.

The green cone swung sharply around, broadside to the telescope.

"Good. they're firing lateral," said Lew to himself. "Maybe they can do a hyperbolic past it." He raised his voice. "Don't spare the horses. Cancel, damnit. Use all the power available. You *must* pull away."

The two objects seemed to be pulling apart. Louis suspected that that was illusion, for the two objects were almost in line-of-sight. "Don't let the small mass fool you," he said, unnecessarily now. "Computer, what's the mass of a ten-foot neutronium sphere? Around two times ten to the minus six times the mass of this world, which is pretty tiny, but if you get too close . . . . Computer, what's the surface gravity? I don't believe it."

The two objects seemed to be pulling together again. Damn, thought Louis. If they hadn't come along, that'd be me.

He kept talking. It wouldn't matter now, except to relieve his own tension. "My computer says ten million gravities at the surface. That may be off. Newton's formula for gravity. Can you hear me?"

"They are too close," said the alien. "By now it is too late to save their lives."

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It was happening as he spoke. The ship began to crumble a fraction of a second before impact. Impact looked no more dangerous than a cannonball striking the wall of a fort. The tiny silver bead simply swept through the side of the ship. But the ship closed instantly, all in a moment, like tinsel paper in a strong man's fist. Closed into a tiny sphere. A tiny sphere ten feet through or a bit more.

"I mourn," said the alien.

"Now I get it," said Louis. "I wondered what was fouling our laser messages. That chunk of neutronium was right between our ships bending light beams."

"Why was this trap set for us? Have we enemies so powerful that they can play with such masses?"

A touch of paranoia? Louis wondered. Maybe the whole species had it. "Just a touch of coincidence. A smashed neutron star."

For a time the alien did not speak. The telescope, for want of a better target, remained focused on the bead. Its glow had died.

The alien said, "My pressure suit will not keep me alive long."

"We'll make a run for it. I can reach Margrave in a couple of weeks. If you can hold out that long, we'll set up a tailored environment box to hold you until we think of something better. It only takes a couple of hours to set one up. I'll call ahead."

The alien's triple gaze converged on him. "Can you send messages faster than light?"

"Sure."

"You have knowledge worth trading for. I'll come with you."

"Thanks a whole lot." Louis Wu started punching buttons. "Margrave. Civilization. People. Faces. Voices. Bah." The ship leapt upward, ripping atmosphere apart. Cabin gravity wavered a little then settled down.

"Well," he told himself, "I can always come back."

"You will return here?"

"I think so," he decided.

"I hope you will be armed."

"What? More paranoia?"

"Your species is insufficiently suspicious," said the alien. "I wonder that you have survived. Consider this neutronium object as a defense. Its mass pulls anything that touches it into a smooth and reflective spherical surface. Should any vehicle approach this world, its crew would find this object quickly. They would assume it is an artifact. What other assumption could they make? They would draw alongside for a closer examination."

"True enough, but that planet's empty. Nobody to defend."

"Perhaps."

The planet was dwindling below. Louis Wu swung his ship toward deep space.

— LARRY NIVEN

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bailey's ark

No animal but man could survive the results of Man's blunders — unless Bailey's scheme worked!

It was quiet in the zoo now. Bailey could hear the ocean booming down in the valley, miles from where he was hiding.

He crawled from under the little footbridge and checked his watch. Ten-twenty. He wished it was darker, but they'd left the lights on in the elephant house across the way. Each of its tall windows cast a bar-shadowed beam into the quadrangle. Unrippled, the seal pool at his left gave back perfect reflections.

Silhouettes of walking men crossed it. Bailey ducked back under and heard them come out of the big house, toward him. They shuffled across overhead, talking quietly, then crunched out of earshot down the graveled path toward the admin building. That would be those three holographic technicians, changing the tapes, he thought. Wonder what they'll show tomorrow.

He stuck his head out again. New windows lit up down at the admin building, the control room. Faint mechanical noises drifted out to him, followed by the squeal of an elephant. It came twice more completely, but the fourth blast was cut off midway, and Tantor subsided in a pop of static. Distant laughter. Then the lights in the elephant house went out.

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Bailey scrambled up the low bank, dragging his pack behind. Though the cuffs of his black trousers shone wetly, his feet still comfortably dry in their boots. A pale line showed where the dark jersey had crept up to expose an inch of his thin white belly. He tugged it back down.

His first step toward the live-animal compound seemed to make all the noise in the world. Maybe he should go around on the grass outside the quadrangle of buildings. He changed course and slipped between the bear pits and the aviary. Someone had left the birds on, though the sound was off.

He stopped and watched the tape run through, he couldn't help it. A smile crossed his wrinkled face, and the man could feel his pulse rate slow back down to normal. Thirty birds danced in the free air there, breathtakingly real. It was as if he was back in Asheville forty years ago. That cardinal there, fluttering so boldly forward to the front of the cage, like the one his sister used to feed from the back veranda . . . .

There was a click and a faint discontinuity of motion as the tape turned over for a rerun. There hadn't been a cardinal alive since the floods began.

Tearing himself away, Bailey slipped along the rows of empty cages. The overstuffed knapsack kept brushing things. Working his way from the admin building toward the live animal compound, he stopped at the last corner and peered carefully around it.

There it stood, dominating one whole side of the square. Eight feet of hurricane fence, outlining an eighty by two hundred foot rectangle. Inside was an empty corridor in which two men with rifles paced endlessly, then another fence like the first. There were batteries of floodlights at either end of the compound, and Bailey could plainly see the old collie where she lay sleeping on the grass near the middle. Men guarding dogs, Bailey thought, times have changed. But Hilda was twenty per cent of the dogs in the world.

Backing out of sight again, Bailey heaved off his knapsack and sat down. He pushed the jumper cables to one side and carefully unwrapped the air pistol. The bottle of bourbon had leaked a little. Where were the darts? Good grief, he hadn't forgotten — no, he hadn't. The test tube bounced out on the ground when he shook the flap. Bailey took a deep breath and tried to calm himself.

When he unstoppered the tube the familiar smell of Amtol wafted up to him. Fishing each of the

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six tiny darts out by its tufts with forceps, Bailey dropped them into the magazine of his pistol. He poured the excess sedative in after them, stoppered the tube, closed the gun.

Bailey dropped the thing in his lap and stared at it. He had that empty, waiting feeling, wondering if he had the nerve. After all, it was no skin off his nose if they wanted to start the new world without animals. He wasn't going to make the trip, himself. He became aware of the angry ocean again, snarling through the West Virginia valleys like a waiting tiger . . . .

They'd turned the tiger loose twenty years earlier with two surprisingly small bombs. One was a routine blast by the New Zealanders to trigger seismographic echoes in the Antarctic. The other was a mistake, when the French got two for the price of one on their north Australian test facility.

There was talk later of timing and the earth's crust resonating. Both continents settled about a foot, and the seafloor between them rose a quarter mile. It was still going up, and the rest of the world was being flooded by the displaced water.

Man's adaptable. The survivors headed for high ground, scratched out a living. But nearly every animal in the world died. Environments shifted too widely for them, food chains broke and tried to reform along unworkable lines.

For two decades people had been watching the water rise around them. Some tried to build arks, failed. As far as anyone in Charleston, West Virginia could tell, theirs was the last one. They'd dug a hole in the mountaintop and intended to cool it by nuclear power to cryogenic temperatures. Fourteen people would be sealed inside, to be automatically awakened in eleven hundred years when the waters subsided.

Fourteen people, no animals. That's what got Bailey. Noah hadn't done it that way. And even though he wasn't one of the fortunate fourteen, the thought of a new world where men were without a single companion species appalled him.

Determined again, Bailey got up and shoved the pistol in his hip pocket. He opened the bourbon bottle, took a deep breath, and began to sing.

"Oh, I was bor-rn in east Virgin-yaah —" He rounded the corner, staggered, swore.

"Nor' Car'li-ina I did ro-oam . . . ." Bailey waved the bottle, sloshing some on his sleeve. Both the guards heard him and stopped where they stood, but they hadn't spotted him yet.

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"There I met me-ee a fair pretty maiden-n . . . ." They saw him. The big one at the far end of the compound began to run up toward his younger companion. The nearer raised his rifle uncertainly.

"Her name and a-age I do not kno-ow . . . ." Bailey was at the fence now, stumbled forward against it. The pistol almost slid out of his hip pocket. He lurched, a seraphic smile on his face, saluted the nearer guard with the bourbon and subtly pushed the gun back in place.

"Her hair it wa-as of a bright-some color . . . ."

"Hey Ed, who in —?" said the big one as he came up.

"Some drunk. Don't know how he got past the main gate."

"And her li-ips were rooby re-ed," Bailey sang. "Here y'are, guys, how 'bout a?" He proffered the fifth, clumsily trying to get it through the wire mesh.

"Come on Mac, cut the crap," said the smaller guard. "You don't belong in here." He lowered his rifle. The other one said, "I'll call admin. Give 'em hell, letting a bum in here." He turned, headed for the call box which hung on a fencepost a few paces away.

Bailey had fallen to the ground and dropped his bottle. Rolling half over in the grass, he rubbed the pistol free and got it between his heels. Then he rose as far as his knees. "Aw now, fellas, don' go gettin' mad."

"You're drunk, Grandpop," the young guard said disgustedly.

Chug.

The other turned at the unfamiliar sound, his hand on the receiver. "Ed?"

Chug.

Bailey stood up and thrust the pistol back in his pocket. Both guards lay on the grass inside the compound. The first had fallen across his rifle, and his arm was twisted around it awkwardly. The second was flat on his back, but had fumbled the receiver off its hook before he'd fallen. Bailey would have to hurry.

He trotted back for his pack. Returning, he ran the jumper cables between two consecutive fenceposts and then went to work on the mesh between them. Apparently he'd done it right, no alarm sounded.

Tightness in his lungs reminded Bailey of his heart. He slowed, counted to a hundred, resumed cutting. The wire cutters were clumsy things.

It was so damn quiet. Roused by the earlier noise, Hilda had come over and sniffed at the guard who lay against the inside fence. Bailey called softly, soothing her. Hilda was sixteen years old and blind. She wagged once,

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then waddled back to her old spot and threw herself down with a sigh.

Bailey thought he could get through. Wriggling under the four-loop slit he'd made, he got about as far as his chest and had to wriggle back again. His shirt had ripped, and there was a little blood underneath. He opened the mesh two more loops. His hands looked old, working away in the hard glare of the floodlights. This time he made it.

Scrambling across to the call box, he stepped over the bigger guard and raised the receiver cautiously to his ear. Nothing, not even a buzz. Was that good or bad? He didn't know. He replaced it, then went over and straightened the kid's twisted arm from around his rifle. A quick professional glance told him that it wasn't broken, and Bailey felt relieved.

Reaching back through the hole for his knapsack, he got up and went around the guard aisle to the inner gate. They'd left it open. He went across the dewy grass into the live animal house.

The ticket booth was open too, fortunately. As he snatched the keys from the hook inside the door, Bailey smelled the boiling coffee. He stepped quickly across the little cubicle and snapped off the hotplate. Now, where were the new tickets? He yanked open the cupboard under the sign which read, "Admission $3, Children $1." There they were, four rolls of them, three white and one blue. Holding his knapsack under the shelf, he swept them all in.

Bailey swung back out the door and down the short corridor into the darkened main hall of the building. The raccoon was up, prowling back and forth under the small red light at the back of his pen. Assorted chirps and squeaks came from the far wall, where the last known living family of chipmunks had lived in inbred idiocy for ten years.

Bailey faced right, walked down the line of cages, counting, his hand dragging tentatively along the heavy brass rail. Canada Jay, Parula Warbler, Least Tern . . . . He stopped at the Killdeer's cage.

Switching on his flashlight, he peered in on two slender, sleepy birds. The male was perched by the window to his outdoor cage, and when the light hit him he flew out. But the female seemed unruffled and didn't move from her nest. Bailey slid under the rail and opened the door with the third key he tried. She squawked indignantly and flew out to join her mate. Bailey heard them take up that high, bisyllabic cry of theirs and frowned. They

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could probably hear that down at admin.

Holding each brown-on-brown blotched egg over the lens of his light, Bailey smiled quickly twice, grimaced, then grimaced again. Two duds. That settled that, the chances of the remaining two both being of the same sex were dangerously high. He replaced all four as close to the way he'd found them as possible.

Shutting the cage, he glanced wistfully back at the nest. Too bad, they were so small. They'd have been so much easier to hide.

He walked quickly down to the end and threw his beam into the biggest cage in the room. Perched high on a dead stump, the only other brooding pair of birds in the world peered proudly down with cruel eyes. Ospreys. Bailey dreaded going in there.

From behind him came the faint but unmistakable ring of the phone. The edges of Bailey's field of vision flared brilliantly, and his lungs blew up in his chest.

Fumbling open the phial, he got the tablet down as he went. He made it to the phone in the ticket-seller's cage before it had rung twice more.

"Saul?" demanded an irritated voice in the receiver. "Ed?"

Clearing his throat, Bailey tried to remember the flat tenor of the kid. "It's Ed," he said. "What is it?"

"What is it, what's with you? I thought I heard those birds and when I called the other phone you didn't answer."

"Just having some coffee."

"Both together? You guys know better than that."

"Sorry."

"Sorry he says. Now get the hell back out there." There was a loud click, then the line went dead.

Bailey hung up, stumbled over to the bench and leaned against it. Actually, it was a lucky break. He'd probably not be bothered now. But it occurred to him that one more onset of angina would probably kill him.

Bailey hurried back out into the dark roomful of cages. He should tackle the birds under the influence of that last pill. It would help, certainly. Maybe he ought to alter his plans and hit them each with a dart. But no, two unconscious birds would give away the whole thing. Once they discovered the eggs were stolen it would be obvious who'd done it. He'd said too much in public.

So Bailey put on the heavy vest, gloves and hood he'd brought, and loaded the water gun with ammonia. Then he opened the cage and went in. The shale rocks on the left wall of the cage would eventually bring him within reaching distance. He took

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a last look up at the unruly bale of sticks that served as an eyrie. It was twenty feet from the floor. Then he started to climb.

Bailey could see the female turn nervously to face him, though not rising from the eggs. The male stood more erectly, opening his beak, hunching his shoulders and hissing.

Ospreys lay somewhere between hawks and eagles. They caught fish by diving for them, so people used to call them fish hawks. And perched, they weren't larger than hawks. Their bellies and throats were a clear white, and their backs, slate gray.

In a sort of lethal way they were almost attractive. Unless you dwelt too long on their heads or feet, or until they spread their wings. Those parts were an eagle's.

Bailey was halfway up when the male launched himself from the nest. In the dim light he could have sworn those black-barred wings reached from one wall to the other, but he knew better. Only six feet. He locked his heels in a shale fissure and backed securely against the ledge.

The osprey *preee'd* twice, buffeting the air in a larruping hover not two feet from Bailey's face. He could smell the thing even under his hood, foul and fishy and sharp. Those talons were as big as his own hands, and they chopped in unison — open toward him, closed away — with each beat of the huge wings. Bailey opened fire with the ammonia.

That shrill scream again. Talons slamming against his chest like the open-palmed thrust of a bully, then closing. Cloth and plastic ripping, beartraps in the meat of his bosom. Bailey fired again. A dull hatchet battering at the lenses of his mask, head slipping backward and bouncing on the rock, things turning red. Bailey fired again. His own scream, the bird's scream, the round gray tongue seen through a cracked lens, the other lens cracking, beartraps gone. Bird gone.

The female followed. Bailey scrambled the rest of the way up, and reached across two feet of empty air to the nest in the crotch of the tall stump.

Four eggs, red and gold on brown, round, hensize. Into the foam stockings, into the sac of gel, into his shirt.

Birds outside screaming to high heaven, voices from the other end of the zoo, running feet on gravel. From the other pocket came four false eggs, plastic, carefully painted. Into the nest.

Bailey swung down, jumped the last four feet.

Wipe up the blood. His. Out of the cage and lock it. Into the little room to replace the keys.

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Outside. Up from the waterfountain to the window ledge to the porch roof to the main roof. Over to the ledge. Heart again, but not so bad. Lay off the pills, use the serum.

Bailey slid the syringe into his left buttock. The warm feeling spread, enveloping his groin, his belly, his screaming chest and finally his head. People were shouting down below, but their voices seemed blurred. Everything was slowing down. He'd be unable to run if they discovered him, he knew. But if he could run and did, the run would kill him. *Preee!* he heard. Pre pre pre. Silly birds, he was doing it for their own good. Dogs barking. Stupor coming. Make it through the night if they don't find me up here, Bailey thought.

They didn't. At ten-thirty the next morning, Bailey awoke. He gazed straight up into a gray sky through two cracked lenses. When he took off the heavy hood, each movement of each muscle was an intricate study in pain. Then he lay there for a while, because things wouldn't focus.

The eggs. Incautiously, Bailey sat bolt upright, to find himself looking over the low roof wall at a burgeoning crowd of zoo-goers down in front of the building. He ducked again.

The knapsack was still on his back, he'd been lying on it. Perhaps that accounted for the state of his neck. Oh, no, he remembered the osprey. Sliding the straps up, Bailey shrugged away from the bulky pack. Fumbling through the junk inside, he found the gelsac. Four apples of foam shockproofing floated within the translucent slime. He carefully opened the sac, then each of the socks.

Removing the eggs, he held them up to the cloudy sun and peered at the shadowy creatures inside. He smiled, then repacked the eggs. That done, he concentrated on his wounds.

There were painful lumps all over his head, but nothing serious. Removing the thick vest, he

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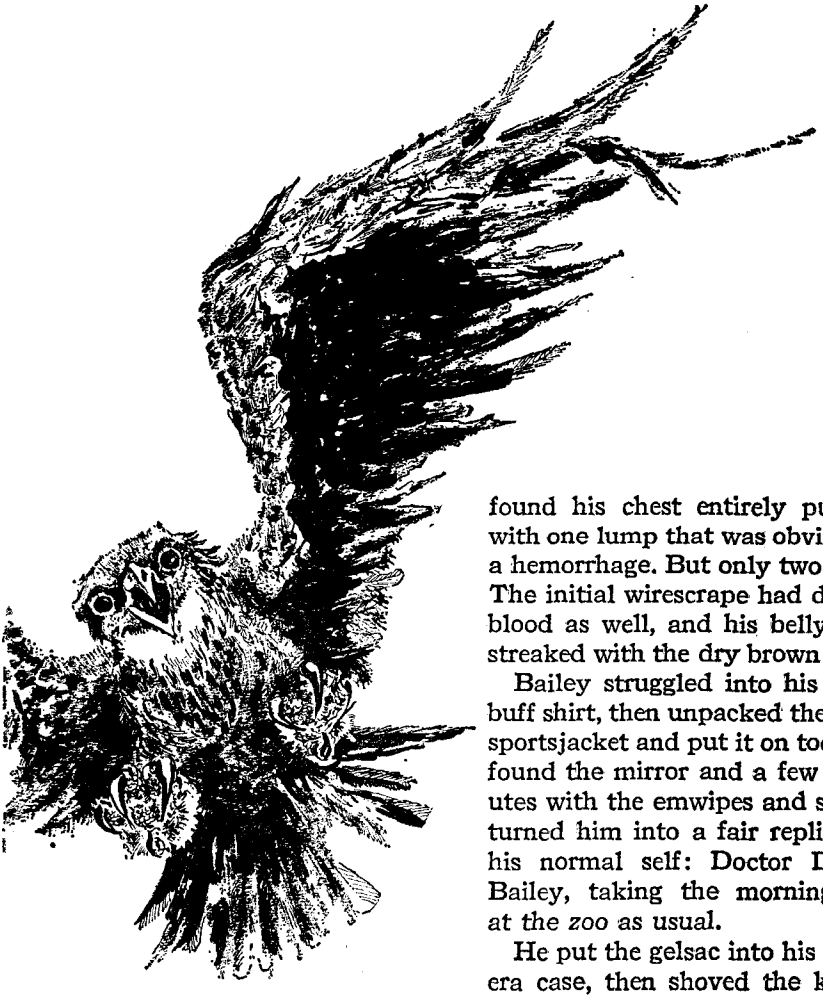

found his chest entirely purple, with one lump that was obviously a hemorrhage. But only two cuts. The initial wirescrape had drawn blood as well, and his belly was streaked with the dry brown of it.

Bailey struggled into his light buff shirt, then unpacked the blue sportsjacket and put it on too. He found the mirror and a few minutes with the emwipes and swabs turned him into a fair replica of his normal self: Doctor David Bailey, taking the morning off at the *zoo* as usual.

He put the gelsac into his camera case, then shoved the knapsack beneath the roof vent where a casual check wouldn't uncover it.

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He listened to the chatter down below. A thousand dollars worth of tickets had been stolen the night before. Screwy, eh? Why take on two armed guards for some tickets that could be voided anyway? Oh, a couple of drunks, two of them, at least. No sense to it. Could see it if they stole the dogs. Meat, you know. Some people are really to be hung up on it. No, I haven't either. But a lot of older people have. Screwy, eh? But they left the dogs alone, the screwballs.

It was exactly what Bailey wanted to hear. He edged across the roof to peer down over the back door. Most people used the front, but there was a crowd of kids at the back now. He'd have to wait.

In a few minutes a young woman came out and led them away. With no one in sight, Bailey dropped to the porch roof, then from the sill to the fountain to the ground. A middle-aged man came out as he struck earth, but Bailey pretended to be tying a shoe.

Going around front, he mingled with the outgoing stream of people, turning his face as they passed the guards. But no worry, the two he'd seen were off duty. He stopped at the seal pond, agreed casually with an old woman there, who said it wasn't very good, holograms don't splash.

Then, one hand cupped self-consciously over the camera case, Bailey went out the main gate of the zoo.

He'd brought it off.

Bailey suppressed a cheer; his step was unusually light. A ten-minute walk brought him to the West Virginia State Hospital, where he worked. Checking in, he smiled affably at the head nurse, who waved with a curious grin. Of course, he thought ruefully, I need a shave.

Bailey went down to the basement, past a sign that said, "Restricted to ARK personnel only," and into his office.

He showered, shaved, dressed the cuts on his stomach and chest. Opening a can of peas, he took it along with a handful of supplemental wafers over to his desk. Janie'd brought the newspaper, and it waited there.

Nothing new. The colony over at Goff's Mountain was gone for sure, but most people had known that for weeks. There was a vitamin B 12 shortage. The tides now swept as high as the old glass factory, and the available land area of Charleston had shrunk another two per cent. Best prediction of total deluge remained the same at six and a half years. Some ninny had broken into the zoo.

Good enough, Bailey thought and tossed down the paper. Fin-

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ishing the peas, he noticed the date on the can. Thirty-four years old, borderline. They shouldn't really be issuing this stuff. He made a note. Then he went through his IN box.

Right on top was the memo he'd sent the Board. As usual, they hadn't honored him with a formal reply. Typed on the back of his own note was the usual red-printed rebuff.

Dear Dr. Bailey:

Your idea of cryofying unborn puppies to accompany the human occupants of the ARK is touching in its sentimentality. But, Doctor, you know better than that.

How many reasons do you need? First of all, nobody scheduled for preservation in the ARK wants them. Second, while the danger of contamination is slight, it's real. Finally and most significantly, the ARK's limited capacity precludes taking on any but human cargo.

To elaborate on this: even if you could reduce the puppies to less than five pounds, (which despite your considerable abilities we doubt), you'd still be requiring the human occupants of the ARK to lose a collective five pounds of body weight to make room. You know the dynamics of cryobiology as well as we do, Doctor, and such action could well be fatal.

It may interest you that the latest estimate of re-emergence has been moved up to fifteen hundred years, which makes fat storage even more critical.

We're aware of your feelings about animals, but these requests of yours are becoming a nuisance. Believe us when we say that animals aren't needed, aren't wanted, aren't possible in the new world.

Arnold J. Carter, Jr.
For the Board

Scribbled underneath in red pencil was a note from Arnie himself, "Come on, Dave, lay off, will you?"

Bailey wadded the thing up and hurled it across the room. Getting up, he went into the lavatory and brought out the eggs. An afterthought, he buzzed his secretary.

"Janie?" he said into the grille.

"Good morning, Doctor."

"What's on?"

"Nothing just now. Gordon Alton at one."

"All right. I'll be analyzing prints till then. Don't let anyone in, eh?"

"Yes, Doctor."

It was almost noon. He'd have to hurry to be ready for young Gordon. Bailey primed the autoclave, left the vent open, switched it on. He got the resin from his lower desk drawer.

Dipping the teflon cloths in the

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fluid, he patted them into place on each of the eggs. He wished they weren't so big. When he opened the autoclave only a few wisps of steam escaped, the rest having gone out the vent. Good. The stuff was supposed to cure in dry heat, but this would probably do.

Now to set up the ruse. The kid had an eidetic memory, so no need to overdo it. Bailey got out a plaster model of a man's wrist, splinted it, bound it doused it with resin.

Into the autoclave it went, and Bailey set the timer.

Forty minutes later it rang, and ten after that, Janie buzzed. That would be Gordon. He told her to send him in.

The door opened a cautious six inches, and most of a chubby freckled face appeared five and a half feet from the floor. Bailey smiled and beckoned. "Come on in, Gordon." With the awkwardness of extreme weight, Gordon Alton crossed and took a chair. He was twelve and parentless, the only survivor of a family lost when Wheeling had gone under. His IQ was close to two hundred, and he was one of the fourteen people going into the ARK.

He sat politely and watched as Bailey labored to remove a plastic cast from a plaster model of a hand. The doctor had apparently just run out of solvent and was spitting on the thing to soften the plastic.

"That's pretty neat, Doc."

"One of the marvels of modern medicine," Bailey said ruefully. "Oh, to hell with it." Bailey shoved it into his lower desk drawer, his point made.

He folded his hands on the desk, looked up and smiled. "How've you been, Gordon?"

"Oh, okay. They gave me a sending-off party yesterday, and all the girls cried."

"Well, that's women. Did you make your weight?"

The boy looked ruefully down at his enormous stomach. "Just two-thirty. Guess that ought to hold me for a thousand years."

"Fifteen hundred's the latest guess."

"Oh?" Gordon was silent for a while. "We going to the zoo?"

Bailey played it cool. "If you want to."

"Yeah, I guess so."

Bailey got up, took his jacket off the hook, patting the breast pocket to check. He wasn't sure what good the dartgun would be if he was recognized, but it made him feel better to have it.

They left the hospital and headed across town.

Bailey paid for the tickets at the main gate, and they went into the zoo. Gordon hadn't said

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much. Naturally he'd be subdued, Bailey reminded himself, he's going under tonight.

Aloud he said, "Let's try the elephants, I think they've changed the tapes." As they crossed the footbridge over the seal pool's spillway, Bailey smiled.

The elephant house did not smell of elephants, it smelled of cigarettes and the stickiness of melted ice cream, like a movie theater on Saturday afternoon. A few adults and a lot of children gazed in on the display.

"Grandma saw a real elephant once, Sally," an old woman said. "Back before the floods. We used to feed them."

Sally shrugged. But as Tantor clumped past with his trunk extended for peanuts, she tossed part of her sucker. It went through the image to join the other wasted gifts on the floor. Bailey winced.

Gordon caught it. "You know, Doctor Bailey, you old guys are amazing."

"You're getting to like animals, aren't you, Gordon?"

"Well, sort of. But not like you, Doc, not like you old guys. I like it when you bring me to the zoo and all." The round freckled face frowned. "But you know."

Bailey nodded and they drifted out of the elephant house. No, you can't just tell someone to love something. But there was still his last card. "Let's go to the live animals, Gordon."

Out on the perimeter of the compound, the guard called Saul was talking through the fence to two small boys.

Bailey paid again, and they went in. With more enthusiasm now, Gordon went over to the killdeer's cage, "You're right, Doc. So those are eggs, the real thing." The boy leaned over the rail, resting on his paunch and eventually lifting up his feet. "Sa-ay."

Bailey gazed down at the back of the round, curly head. Sa-ay. Was that a say of curiosity, or a say of honest wonder? He could hope.

At any rate, this seemed like the right time. Leaving the boy, Bailey went over to the keeper.

"Hello, Mr. Hart."

"Oh, hi Doctor, How're you today?"

"Fine. Listen. I brought him, he's with me now."

Hart tilted the blue cap back on his head. "The one that's going in the ARK, eh? That one?" He pointed.

"No, the heavyset boy to the left. Do you think we could do what I asked you about?"

Hart grimaced. "Yah, guess so. Don't tell 'em down at admin, though."

Bailey went over and retrieved Gordon, then propelled him by

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the shoulder after Hart's retreating back. He led them to a workroom adjacent to the ticket window and snapped on the light.

Blinking blind eyes, Hilda raised her head from a box by the window. Gordon jumped backward.

"He's loose!"

Bailey went over and crouched by the old collie. "It's a she, Gordon. Hilda. Want to pet her?"

The boy edged across the floor. Hilda inclined a muzzle toward him, nostrils going. Her heavy tail thumped once, tentatively, against the side of the box.

Gordon squatted beside and a little behind Bailey. He took the boy's hand and guided it to Hilda's thick white ruff.

"Like this?"

"Yes, Gordon."

Hart coughed politely after a few minutes. Bailey stood up, then bent down and gently moved Hilda's head from the boy's lap. Gordon let himself be led out.

"Well," Bailey said with forced lightness. "Let's take a look at the ospreys. They're brooding, too."

They watched in silence for a few minutes. The female's head peered imperiously down at them over the edge of her nest. Gordon got his voice back. "How long'll she have to sit there before they hatch?"

"I don't really know." But of course he did. "It's all on the card there, down below. Look it over while I make a head run."

As Bailey walked down to the men's room he was mentally rubbing his hands together. Eidetic memory. All he has to do is read the card.

He was washing his face when the stall behind him opened and the guard Ed's eyes met his own in the mirror.

"You!"

The kid was fast. Bailey rolled but the billie still grazed his ear and smashed across his collarbone. Turning, Bailey braced his left leg against the washbowl, put both hands squarely on the man's chest and pushed. The blue uniform fell back into the stall. But Ed caught himself on the doorjamb, shouted again, raised the club for another blow. Bailey knew better than to match reflexes with a younger man. He backed quickly down the line of washstands.

A head popped out of the last stall and was almost sheared off as Ed crashed past toward Bailey, who was reaching for his gun.

Chug. But the guard was on top of him; panicked, Bailey fired again. A man could die from two shots of the stuff. He'd have to —

Now the bystander poked his head out again, saw the prostrate guard, began to yell. Bailey aimed

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carefully, got him in the thick of the arm.

Behind him the door was swinging open. Jamming the gun back in his jacket, Bailey shouted, "Help, help!" and bulled his way through the incoming crowd.

"In there," he called over his shoulder. "They're sick, they need Anamtol," and prayed someone heard and would remember.

The room spun. Where were the pills? No time to — here. Sagging against the wall, he fumbled the tablet into his mouth.

Gordon trotted up, out of breath. "What is it?"

"Never mind. Come on."

They were back at the hospital in a few minutes. Bailey made up enough of a story to at least stem Gordon's tide of questions.

He gave himself two hours until the bystander awoke and described him. Others in the crowd would be able to fill the picture in, since Bailey was a regular at the zoo. Altogether, he might have three hours.

Which was enough. Gordon would be in the ARK by then.

"You'd better go up to the prep room," he told the boy. As he headed obediently for the door, Bailey had a thought. Maybe he should tell him what was going on. "Gordon."

"Yes?"

God, he's young. Brilliant or not, he's still twelve. You don't tell a twelve-year-old kid you've been using him, or that he's about to break most of the rules in the Board's little book. Stick to your plan, man. "Nothing. Good Luck."

"Thanks, Doc. You've been great to me since my folks — "

Bailey's conscience was bludgeoning him. He lowered his eyes.

"Well, all right," the boy said. "But thanks for today, too."

They wheeled Gordon in an hour later in deep hypothermia. Bailey had two operations to perform on the boy's pale body, before passing him along for further work. These were both subcutaneous insertions of crystalline hormones and drugs, which were to augment those expended by the body even while deep in cryo. They were easy operations.

The only difficult part was installing the pull tabs, so that they wouldn't infect during the few hours between coming out of cryo and their removal.

He made the two normal insertions in the loose fat over Gordon's stomach. The third and fourth were placed carefully, so that the tab would be hidden in the fold of flesh between the boy's upper thighs and buttocks. Two of the osprey's eggs went in each.

Once he found them, Gordon would know what to do.

— BURT K. FILER

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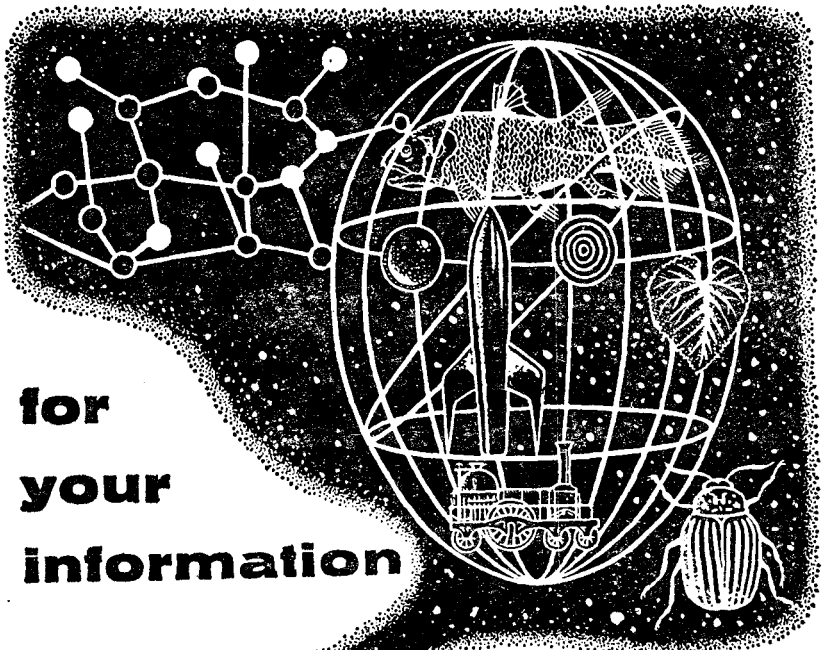
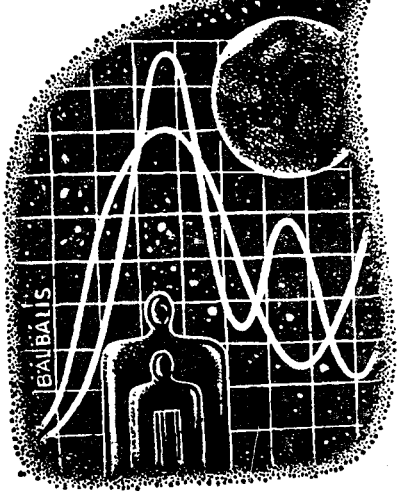


for your information

BY WILLY LEY



INTERPLANETARY COMMUNICATIONS

An even dozen years ago, namely during the early part of 1956, I received a letter telling me that the usefulness of artificial satellites — much discussed at the time but not yet in existence — had to be doubted for one main reason. That reason was that no satellite could possibly carry enough batteries to supply

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the enormous power requirements for transmission of data to the ground. In reply I pointed out the distance of a satellite from the ground was to be only a few hundred miles and that radio waves did not care whether they travelled vertically or horizontally.

Just one and a half years later the first artificial satellites went into orbit, and their signals could be received easily, even though they did not transmit with "enormous power."

Very soon after the beginning of the Space Age, in February 1958, the first American artificial satellite *Explorer I* discovered what we now call the inner Van Allen belt. About a week later I listened to somebody being interviewed on a radio station about this discovery. Since not much was known at the moment the interviewee did not do badly; but then he said that this "radiation belt" would make communication with ships in space nearly impossible. Obviously one could not transmit radio messages through such a belt. Unfortunately you cannot talk back to your radio, but I tried. If I could have talked back I probably would have said that there was no reason to think so, since radio beams do not interfere with each other.

Then actual events began to move so fast that wrong predictions of this type became rare. There simply was not enough time between events to think up a major prediction that would miscarry.

On January 2, 1959, the Russians sent their "Cosmic Rocket No. 2" to the moon; even now it is not clear whether they tried for an impact or not. The spacecraft missed the moon by about twice the moon's diameter, and transmissions were still received after the device had passed the moon's orbit. Transmissions did stop a few hours later — which is the reason for wondering whether the rocket was meant to strike the moon; evidently battery power was supplied only for about the time it would need to reach the moon. At any event "Cosmic Rocket No. 2" had transmitted data over a distance of more than a quarter million miles.

On March 11, 1960 the American space probe *Pioneer V* was sent into orbit around the sun, and in this case transmissions were still received over a distance of about 22 million miles.

On August 27, 1962 the planetary probe *Mariner II* took off for a flyby near the planet Venus. The flyby took place in December 1962, and the maximum distance over which signals had been successfully transmitted grew to 54 million miles.

Finally, planetary probe *Mar-*

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TABLE I

Probable Objects for Communications

Planet:	Diameter (miles)	Orbital Period	Mean distance from sun (miles)	Shortest possible/Longest possible distance from earth (miles)	
Mercury	3,100	88 days	36,000,000	50,950,000	135,460,000
Venus	7,700	224.7 days	67,300,000	24,200,000	161,800,000
Mars	4,200	687 days	141,500,000	34,797,000	340,000,000
Jupiter	88,700	11.86 years	484,000,000	391,000,000	577,000,000

iner IV took off for Mars on November 28, 1964, and it passed near the planet on July 14, 1965. The pictures taken during the flyby were ordered to be transmitted the following day. By then the distance from the earth exceeded 140 million miles.

All of which means that communications over planetary distances are within the state of the art. Of course improvements will be made and innovations will be introduced. But it can be done right now so that, in the discussion of a new project, nobody has to ask whether it is possible, the only question is "from where to where?" And this question now becomes the fundamental assumption for the discussion to follow. The "to where?" part is easy: to the earth. But "from where?" The answer to that depends on how far we are willing to look into the future at this moment.

Let us say that the time limit is the year 1980.

Then the probable targets are those listed in Table I, though it must be added that Mercury should have a question mark. Mercury is the planet least often mentioned when the exploration of space is under discussion. It isn't that Mercury is without scientific interest; in fact its small size, its proximity to the sun and its slow rotation (2/3 of its orbital period of 88 days) make it a very interesting planet from the scientific point of view. But Mercury would be hard to reach. The plane of its orbit is inclined to the ecliptic by a full 7° of arc. Its orbital velocity is high, varying from 24¼ miles per second at its aphelion to nearly 30 miles per second at its perihelion. But a planetary probe approaching Mercury would be still faster, because the gravitational pull of the sun had been acting upon it all

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TABLE II

The "Galilean Satellites" of Jupiter

Designation and name		Diameter (miles)	Distance from Jupiter (miles)	Orbital Period (around Jupiter)
J-I	Io	2300	261,800	1 d. 18 h. 28 ½ min.
J-II	Europa	2000	416,600	3 d. 13 h. 17 ½ min.
J-III	Ganymede	3200	664,200	7 d. 3 h. 59 ½ min.
J-IV	Callisto	3200	1,169,000	16 d. 18 h. 5 min.

through its flight. If a flyby were to do any good, the speed of the probe would have to be drastically reduced, which would mean a high fuel expenditure. In short, a mission to Mercury would be very expensive in terms of fuel.

This leaves only three possible targets in that decade, not counting such a special case as a mission to a comet and a possible flyby near one of the larger asteroids. These targets are Venus, Mars and Jupiter.

In the case of Venus, the high surface temperature—*Mariner II* reported it as 800° Fahrenheit while the instruments of *Mariner V* said "not less than 520° Fahrenheit"; the latter figure agrees with the findings of Russian astronomers — will preclude manned landings for a long time to come. But we might imagine a space station of some sort in orbit around Venus.

Mars will have a ground station at some time. Here nature has been good enough to supply two small moons that will facilitate exploration. I know that every one of my readers knows where to look such things up, but for the sake of convenience let us have a quick rundown of the pertinent figures. Both moons are small with diameters estimated to be around 5 miles. The inner one, named Phobos, is only 5800 miles from the planet's center (or 3,700 miles from the surface) and has an orbital period of 7 hours and 39 minutes. The outer moon, Deimos, is 14,600 miles from the planet's center and has an orbital period of 30 hours and 18 minutes. As can be seen from the figures just given, Deimos is somewhat too slow and a little too far away from the planet to have a synchronous orbit. A truly synchronous satellite of Mars would have to be 1890 miles closer to the planet to match the diurnal

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rotation of Mars, which is 24 hours, 37 minutes and 22½ seconds.

Since the masses of both of these moons are negligible there will be no problem in landing; in fact a landing on Phobos would be more in the nature of a rendezvous and docking maneuver. The object of main scientific interest is, of course, the surface of Mars; but the presence of the moons is helpful when it comes to communications with earth. A number of years ago an expert on communications satellites wrote an interesting paper which dealt with the problem of power for communications through space. Using Mars and earth as an example he arrived at the conclusion that transmission surface to surface would be very costly in terms of power. One would do much better if the exploring party at *Lacus solis* on Mars did not try for direct contact with Goldstone, California, but sent the message to a communications satellite orbiting the earth; and the earth ground stations would then get it from that satellite.

The Martian moons are just right for this purpose, especially the slower moving Deimos.

Before we discuss the problems of interplanetary communications we have to have a look at Jupiter, which will be in reach of improved space vehicles in a few years. Being full of mysteries, Jupiter is especially attractive to astronomers. To begin with we don't know its "true" diameter; the figure for the diameter given in Table I is the diameter of the upper edge of its cloud layer. How far it is from that upper edge to the surface is not known. The atmospheric pressure at the surface is not known. The condition of the surface is not known — and the list of "not-knowns" could go on for a rather long time.

Since Jupiter is five times as far from the sun as the earth it receives only 1/25 as much solar radiation, square mile per square mile, as the earth does. With so little heat one should expect a frozen planet, surrounded by a quiet atmosphere. Well, the planet *may* be frozen — although there is some doubt even about that — but the atmosphere certainly is not quiet. It is in steady and often violent motion, and natural radio waves coming from Jupiter's atmosphere indicate electrical activity.

A close observation of Jupiter over a long period of time from a convenient vantage point is likely to expand our knowledge of low-temperature physics enormously — what is going on in Jupiter's atmosphere contributes quite a number of points to the

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list of "not knowns." Fortunately there are vantage points for a close observation of Jupiter, for the planet has 12 known moons and probably an equal number of unknown ones. Most of the minor moons (the undiscovered ones would all be minor, too) are too far from the planet to be useful, but the four so-called "Galilean satellites," called that after their discoverer, are fairly close to the planet (Table II).

Inside these four major moons there is "No. V" (fifth in the order of discovery) called Amalthea, at a distance of only 112,600 miles. It is small, with a diameter of less than a hundred miles, which would help to make a landing easy. It so happens that Amalthea also runs in a nearly synchronous orbit. The orbital period is 12 hours, while the period of rotation of Jupiter is 9 hours and 55 minutes. This means that Amalthea will stay over a given area of the Jovian atmosphere for a fairly long time, just the situation observers welcome.

So far things look rather uncomplicated. Communications would be to an artificial satellite orbiting Venus, to a moon of Mars and to a moon of Jupiter. But these communications would be interrupted by conjunctions. Drawn as a diagram there would be a straight line, with Jupiter at one end, the earth at the other end and the sun between them. To an observer on earth the planet becomes invisible because it disappears in the glare of the sun. The actual conjunction, when the three bodies form a straight line, lasts only for an instant, but the period when the planet is too close to the sun for observation is fairly long. The *American Ephemeris for the year 1968* states that the actual conjunction of Jupiter and the sun takes place at 7 AM (EST) on September 8, 1968. Nevertheless the listings of the positions of the Jovian moons are omitted for the period from August 1 to September 25, because observations are not feasible during this time.

Assuming that the sun would interfere with observations it appears that each conjunction of Jupiter with the sun would cause a communications blackout for about six weeks. (I may be unduly pessimistic at this point, but the possibility exists so we have to think about it.)

Now Mars and Jupiter only offer the problem of single conjunctions with the line up:

Mars — Sun — Earth.

In the case of Venus we have a kind of doubling of the phenomenon. The line up can be:

Venus — Sun — Earth

which astronomers call a superior

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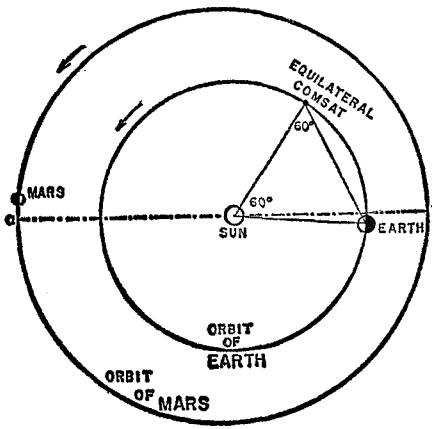

The positions of Mars and earth as they will be in early February 1979. Communications are kept going via an earth equilateral. Dotted line is the major axis of the orbit of Mars; the Martian aphelion and perihelion are marked by the Greek letters *alpha* and *pi*.

conjunction. But there is also the inferior conjunction with the line up:

Sun — Venus — Earth.

Optically Venus disappears in both cases. Whether an inferior conjunction would interfere with communications is something I don't know.

But there is an answer, an answer that was first presented by George O. Smith in a series of science-fiction stories: the equilaterals. The idea was based, a few times removed, on a paper written in 1772 by the French astronomer Joseph-Louis Lagrange, at the time director of Frederick the Great's Prussian Academy of Science in Berlin. Lagrange tried to solve the "three-body problem," concerning the positions of three or more bodies in space that mutually act on each other all the time. He did not solve this problem, but he found several positions, five in all, where a system of three bodies would be stable.

Only two of these positions are of practical interest, the L_4 and L_5 points. (Incidentally the "L" stands for "liberation" and not for Lagrange.) Both lie in the orbit of the planet in question and both form equilateral triangles with the sun and with the planet. The L_4 point of the earth's orbit is the "leading point," being ahead of the earth by 60° of arc. The L_5 point is the "trailing point," being 60° behind.

Such equilaterals actually exist in nature. In the case of Jupiter both points are occupied by a number of asteroids that somehow strayed into Jupiter's orbit. And our moon has very faint dust clouds in both these points; here the triangle is formed by the dust cloud, the moon and the earth.

How an equilateral station in the earth's orbit would solve a communications blackout is shown in the diagram. In early February 1979 Mars will be in

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conjunction — and by that time there will be people on Mars. Mars is then invisible from earth, but not invisible to the equilateral station.

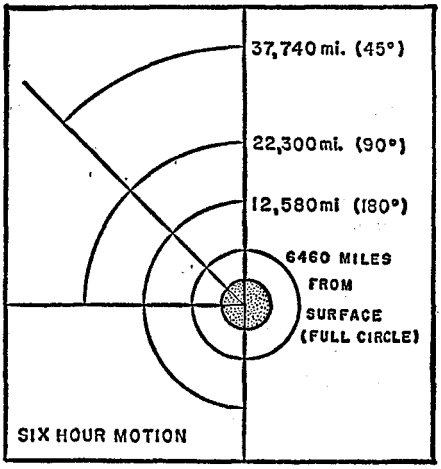
The same would apply to Venus in superior conjunction. And in inferior conjunction, too, if this position should prove troublesome.

ANY QUESTIONS ?

This is an answer to several questions, all of which dealt with the motions of artificial satellites, the meaning of the term "geocentric angle" and the problem of whether it is possible to make a satellite "stand still" in orbit.

To begin with the geocentric angle, it simply means that the vertex of the angle coincides with the center of the earth. The diagram shows, for example, that a satellite in the synchronous orbit 22,300 miles from the surface will move through 90° of arc in six hours, with the vertex of that 90° angle in the earth's center. Some of the confusion that was clearly evident in the letters seems to stem from the fact that the distances of artificial satellites are always given with reference to the surface of the earth, more specifically to the sea level. Normally, in astronomy, the distances between two bodies are the center-to-center distances; since the distances are usually very large compared to the size of the bodies, there is no noticeable difference between center-to-center and surface-to-surface distances. In the case of the sun and the earth the difference is less than half a million miles which counts for very little when compared to the mean distance of the earth from the sun, namely 93 million miles.

But the difference becomes important when a planet and its moons are under discussion. The surface-to-surface distance of the moon and the earth is 5,000 miles less than their center-to-center distance, which averages 239,000 miles. Just to keep things clearly



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separated, the distances of natural moons are always given center-to-center, and the distances of artificial satellites surface-to-satellite.

As for the satellite that "stands still" in space, there can be no such thing. A communications satellite in the synchronous orbit over the equator seems to "stand still" only because its motion in its orbit matches the rotation of the earth.

And if you move a spacecraft sufficiently far from the earth that the earth's gravitational field hardly influences it any more it doesn't "stand still" either, for then it will be in orbit around the sun, moving at the rate of about 18½ miles per second.

—WILLY LEY

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

A couple of years ago a few of us science-fiction writers and editors were being interviewed by an exceedingly drunken reporter for a national weekly magazine. His principal desire appeared to be to reduce each writer to a single phrase — "master of space opera," "specialist in satire," that sort of thing — and when he came to Mack Reynolds he said, "Ah, yes, you're the one who writes the fight scenes."

Reynolds does that, to be sure. He has written any number of stories about future gladiatorial games, the logical outgrowth of today's spectator sports, and he has written them very well. But how much more he can do! We realized this first when chance put us in the company of a number of forward-looking economists, strangers to science fiction, who were entranced and excited by Reynolds's brilliant use of such concepts as Basic Income, the credit-card phenomenon and all of the other politico-socio-economic gadgets he manipulates so handsomely.

So we've invited Reynolds to explore some of these ideas more fully in *Galaxy*, and next month we lead off with what strikes us as a first-rate example of his special skills. Name is *Among the Bad Baboons*, and it's a longish novelette.

Damon Knight brings us a further episode in the Thorinn saga, *The Star Below;* Robert Silverberg has the cover story, *Going Down Smooth;* we continue Fritz Leiber's surgical dissection of American folkways in *A Specter Is Haunting Texas* . . . a good issue, we think; and we hope you'll join us next month to see for yourself.

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DREAMER, SCHEMER

by BRIAN W. ALDISS

Come into my dream! Let's live the life we dreamed of — and see its unhappy endings!

Ego City sprawled and sprawled. In two decades, what had once been merely a modest new entertainment center had grown to the size of a big city. Already, as many lines of communication homed on it as on the capital.

The residents of go City were mainly concerned in one way or another with the making of play-outs. Play-outs were the art form of the century. Play-outs dominated the entertainment world. Play-outs marked the revolutionary point where show business and medical therapy mingled. Everyone needed play-outs.

In two decades of existence, Ego City had seen a number of real dramas, as well as its countless myriad staged ones. Many fortunes had been made and lost there, many companies swallowed, many corporations run out of business. Behind the vast and smooth-working facades of Ego City ran a private history of boardroom battles, orgies, sumptuous dinners, suicides, courage and compromise every bit as startling as the play-outs.

Current king of the play-out empire was Lee Roger Irnstein, billed in the tabloids as Mr. Dream King. Lee Roger Irnstein was a millionaire many times over. His personal income, it was estimated, rivaled that of any one of the smaller European nations. He had climbed to where he was by being an insomniac, working continuously for fifteen years when all his opponents had had to snatch an occasional nap, and by keeping an unsleeping watch for the weaknesses of his opponents.

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Lee Roger Irnstein was not a crook. Nor was he honest; he was simply a single-minded man who never missed any opportunity for advancement through such weaknesses as indecision, compassion or indifference.

Lee Roger Irnstein was tall, wrinkled, totally gray. His age was forty-four. His expression was pleasant enough. But his eyes never blinked, and once their gaze had found an opponent's face it never left it, so that eventually the opponent was almost glad to yield to defeat and sink away out of sight. Despite this characteristic, there was nothing that visibly marked Lee Roger Irnstein off from the rest of his fellow men. The factor that did that was hidden in secrecy from almost everyone but his current wife, Famagusta Martitia, and his downtrodden twelve-year-old son, Lee Roger.

Those two knew that Lee Roger Irnstein had never taken part in a single play-out.

That vast kingdom over which Lee Roger Irnstein ruled presented a glittering facade to the world. Great triumphal arches, high towers, sky balloons, greeted the millions who poured into town from all over the world for their taste of that shaped reality that was so much better, so much sweeter, so much more vivid than the ordinary reality of everyday.

But at one point, the huge industrial complex had broken down into a chaos of rubbish. The massive functional shapes of play-out technology slumped into an avalanche of waste. This was at Southside, along Gulch Road. Here were the extraordinary dumps of Ego City, a landscape of hills and valleys consisting entirely of all the expensive cast-offs of the city, from the largest and glossiest of indestructable packing cases down to once-used dancing slippers, from saloon cars that had been discarded at a drunken whim down to unopened packs of cigarettes thrown away because the cellophane had proved a touch resistant, from private planes that had suddenly ceased to please down to nail-clippers that were too blunt to clip, from monstrous slabs of rusty switch-gear down to still-bright contact lenses.

In this wilderness lived Bernie Burr.

Except for the fact that he never shaved, Bernie Burr looked rather like Lee Roger Irnstein. He too was tall, wrinkled and totally gray. He also was forty-four. His expression was pleasant enough but his gaze — whatever it had once done — now never managed to meet the gaze of another human being. It kept wandering off,

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as if his eyes were too weak to meet the eyesight of anyone else. This was very unlike the behavior of the eyes of Lee Roger Irnstein, the man who had defeated Bernie Burr.

Bernie lived with a tattered lady of his own age called Barley in a battered blue packing case that had once housed a Patterson's Piorgium Model "Dandy." His days were spent scrounging through the enchanted detritus of the Gulch Road dump, his nights telling Barley the story of the great days when he owned half of Ego City. In consequence, Barley spent most of her nights drinking and most of her days asleep with her mouth open on the seat they had pulled out of an old Pullman coach.

It was a curious thing that Bernie Burr should have only that one obsessive topic of conversation. A couple of miles away, in surroundings as luxurious as Bernie's were dreadful, Roger Lee Irnstein similarly had only one topic of conversation to inflict on Famagusta Martitia and Lee Roger Junior. It was the same topic.

"It was a confrontation," he told them. "A classical confrontation. This Bernie Burr wanted to take us over, and we wanted to take him over. It seemed he had all the power, and he slapped this ultimatum on me. I had to accept his corporation's terms by the next morning or else. Then he made one false move."

"I know, he came to see you that evening," Lee Roger Junior said.

"Who's telling this? Go away and play if you can't keep quiet! As I got home that evening, Bernie Burr was waiting in the drive. He caught hold of my jacket and begged me to accept the ultimatum. Said he was having trouble with his directors and he would be thrown out if this deal didn't go through. I told him he was crazy, but he said if I accepted the terms of the ultimatum, he'd see I was okay. It would solve both our troubles, he said. Now what makes a man be that weak?"

Famagusta Martitia said, "He must have been under a terrible strain, honey!"

"Ker-rist, honey, we all were. But why is it that at such a moment of truth one man shows weak and another strong? I mean, it's all wrapped up in the enigma of personality, isn't it? Anyhow, he'd given me his head on a plate. Next morning. I rejected the ultimatum, Bernie Burr got the push just as he said he would, and in the confusion I bought up all his backers piecemeal. Ever since then, nobody's ever heard of

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Bernie again and I've been boss of Ego City."

His wife caressed one of his earlobes. "You deserve it, honey, you've been real lucky!"

Lee Roger Irnstein pulled away as if she had tweaked his ear. "Lucky, honey! Lucky nothing! That was the most unlucky day of my life. At heart I'm just a dreamer, only I never get time to dream. I could have been a great musician instead of a captain of industry. I've been so busy running Ego City, I've never had time to fulfill my personal destiny."

"Then, honey, why did you knock down Bernie Burr like you did?"

"Because I'm the man I am, and I seize chances. I just never had a chance to be a great musician."

"Then the man you are isn't a great musician, honey."

Lee Roger Irnstein got up and began to pace up and down.

"Nobody knows the man I am except me, honey."

Famagusta Martitia went over to the drink machine and had it pour them both another drink. "I don't think that you know the sort of man you are, honey. You ought to go to a play-out. You know, enter one anonymously. It would sort you out tremendously and show you exactly the sort of man you really are."

"Now you're talking nonsense, honey! You know I own those things. I don't have to indulge in them."

"I think you're scared, honey."

And that's how it happened that, a few drinks later, Lee Roger Irnstein was persuaded to enter one of his own play-outs.

Meanwhile, back at the old blue packing case, Bernie Burr was telling Barley of the crisis that had ruined his life.

"I played it clever. I drove down to this guy Irnstein's fancy mansion and collared him when he arrived home. I offered him a perfectly foolproof deal to get these guys off my neck who were riding me, with a big cut for him. Next day, us two could have run Ego City between us."

"Ah, you couldn't run a hot dog stall!" Barley said.

"In those days I could. I had genius then. But that creep Irnstein loused it all up. He double-crossed me next morning, and from then on I was finished."

Barley hiccupped. "You played into his hands, sounds to me. You got chicken!"

"I was meant to be a big boss, not a bum! It was just I played my hand wrong. All I need is another chance to prove it. Just one more chance."

"Don't give me that again! Every day I hear the same tune!

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Look, Bernie, if you had the same chance again, you'd louse it up in the same way, see? Because it's your destiny to be a bum!"

He rose to his feet, clutching the bottle as he did so.

"Don't you call me a bum, you old bat! At heart I'm a very responsible man, a captain of industry, a millionaire, a — "

"A bum!" Barley finished. "You're kidding yourself! If you want to find out the sort of jerk you really are, why don't you go into a play-out and see for yourself, instead of boring me with your load of hogwash?"

He poured her another drink. "I love you, Barley," he said brokenly, " 'cause you always know what's best for me."

What happened when you entered one of the play-out theaters was not simple, but it was fast. Pleasant machines put you under light hypnosis to remove any surface inhibitions. You then stated roughly what your problem was, or what situation you wanted to amuse yourself with that evening. These reports were flashed to a group of human and computer analysts and coordinated with the reports of everyone else entering the play-outs at the same time. People with similar ends in view were grouped together. Cast lists were formed, and immense script-writing machines assembled a plot to fit the personalities involved.

While this was going on, and it took only a minute, you were being given the drugs that would most easily enable you to behave as the personality you wished to be. Then the plot came on, was played to you subliminally, and the costuming and make-up departments saw to it that you looked the part. By the time that was done, you had your role effortlessly memorized — though there was always room left for adlibbing.

All over Ego City stood the play-out theaters, many of them of tremendous size — the sexual theaters being the smallest because those who wanted that sort of play-out needed little action in their scripts. After the make-up department had finished with you, you would be conveyed by tube to the appropriate theater, if you were not already there. Many of the theaters specialized in period plays, because it had been found that people could express their basic needs more freely when out of their own time. No one troubled about historical accuracy. It was the spirit that counted. In the theaters were no audiences, only participants — actors working with other actors, but each isolated in his or her own little ego.

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In Theater Fifty-Five, it was a blustery spring day in the sixth or seventh century. Dramatically lit by the only sunbeam to penetrate the cloud overhead, King Petrovich stood with his arms akimbo, looking south towards the mountains, while his wife, Branka, waited behind him at a respectful distance.

Petrovich was tall, wrinkled, totally gray. His age was forty-four, his expression was not unpleasant. But as he looked toward the valley down which his army must pass on the morrow, a frown creased his forehead.

Behind him, a temple was being built. Behind that stretched his army, resting, cooking their lean rations. Women and children mingled with the men of Petrovich's army. And behind them were the other followers, the rabble who had followed his triumphant progress for five years across the wildernesses of Eastern Europe.

"You must rest and eat now, O my king, in preparation for the morrow's march into Illyria," Branka said, taking his arm timidly.

"Cease, woman! Petrovich cannot rest while the fate of his peoples is at stake."

"It is a heavy burden you bear, my lord."

She was beautiful, tall, pale, red of lip, her hair black and skillfully dressed, hanging down to her waist. Petrovich seized her by the waist and kissed her till her mouth was bruised.

"Aye, the burden of my fate is heavy, woman, as you say. Therefore I go to pray."

Branka fell back as the king strode forward into the temple. The rude palisade of the temple was decorated in a crude manner with the figures of soldiers and naked maidens. Inside, the roof was red and the walls hung with tapestries. Although the carpenters were still at work on the temple, their mallet-strokes echoing through the interior, the priests were already busy, and the smoke from a burnt offering drew tears in the king's eyes.

He prostrated himself before his god, a great wooden idol twice his size. It had two bodies and four heads, all of them fearsome. Against one of its massive thighs lay its saddle, bridle and mighty silver sword, which Petrovich alone of all his people was strong enough to wield in battle.

His prostrations were brief. He rose, scattering the priests, and strode into the open towards his great tent of hide which took twenty men to pitch. A scout ran up to him, panting, and bowed.

"Well, varlet?"

"My lord, the King of the Illyrians is in the camp. He desires word with you."

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"King Donikpus? How comes he here?"

"My lord, he comes in peace and even now awaits your gracious permission to speak with you."

"Have him brought to my tent."

Striding in through the heavy damask curtain, Petrovich scattered his serving women.

"But you must sustain yourself, O my King!" Branka cried.

"No time for that — get these women from my sight! Bring me good Transylvanian wine. Donikpus, King of Illyria, is here to see me."

The queen gasped. "But my lord, he is your sworn enemy! Has he not vowed to slay you tomorrow when you march into his lands?"

"There's villainy afoot. I'll see that I question him closely."

"O my King, whispers are abroad that your general Yovan thinks to spread mutiny among your subjects."

Petrovich stroked his great iron gray beard and raised an eyebrow. "I have no time to waste on the sub-plot now, woman. Stick to the main scripts. Where's the wine?"

A great oxhorn bound in silver and splashing over with the dark red liquor of Transylvania was brought to him. As he quaffed it back, trumpets sounded without and General Yovan entered with the King of the Illyrians and attendant lords, etc.

Donikpus and Petrovich stared each other in the eye. Donikpus, for all his outlandish garb and armor that aped the Roman, was not unlike his rival though he wore no beard. He was tall, wrinkled and would probably have been fair were he not totally gray. He was forty-four years of age; his expression would have been pleasant were he not scowling now. Branka thrust an oxhorn of wine into his hand, and the tension in the tent somewhat relaxed.

"You realize your head is in jeopardy every moment you remain in my camp?" Petrovich said.

"You do not imagine I enter this pagan place for pleasure?"

"State your business and be gone!"

"Mind I do not go without stating it! Or your corpse, Petrovich, will lie reeking in the dust by tomorrow's sunset."

"You dare to threaten me, Donikpus? I'll ride into battle with your body rolling behind my horse!"

"I'll have you driven back to the wilds from which you came!"

"I'll have your entrails strewn through every field between here and Kief!"

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General Yovan coughed. "My lords, the script, I pray! Should not the King of the Illyrians state his business?"

"You're right," Donikpus said, quaffing his wine. "Petrovich, we are both in mortal danger. I come to offer an alliance."

"An alliance with you!" boomed Petrovich. "What means this?"

"Ride with me two leagues to the hills, and I will show you proof of the danger. Unless you are afraid . . . ."

Petrovich looked about him, at the anxious face of his wife, the stolid face of Yovan, the stern faces of the attendant lords, etc. He took another great drag at his wine. "I'll ride with you," he said. As his wife ran with him weeping to his horse he said to her, "And keep an eagle eye on the dastardly designs of General Yovan."

"Sure, honey," she said. "So will I, by my troth."

Entirely unaccompanied, the two kings rode together out of camp. It was sunset now, and all the western sky was a ragged mass of red and gold cloud. The ground beneath them was dark as they spurred their steeds up the side of the hill.

At last they reined at the summit. The camp lay behind, fires twinkling here and there, an occasional burst of hoarse song rising even to this eminence. South lay the mountains and the somber valley of the Siva River.

"That way you and your host must go tomorrow," Donikpus said, pointing down the valley. "You will be wiped out from behind. You see that old stone Mithraic temple over there, at the beginning of the valley?"

"It is deserted. My scouts examined it thoroughly this afternoon."

"Empty it is, Petrovich. But under it are great caves. All this barren mountain is a maze of caves. Those caves are filled with half the Illyrian host. When you have passed, they will burst out and attack you from the rear, while the other half will attack from the front. You will be slaughtered to a man."

Petrovich turned his scowling regard to the other, searching that wrinkled face lit by the light of the dying sun.

"You are the Illyrian king, yet you tell me this! How so?"

And Donikpus explained. He was in trouble, particularly with his upstart son, Prince Gorgues, who would lead the ambush. Donikpus wanted to do a deal with Petrovich. He would fix things so that they would have an alliance together, and in the morning, they could unite forces and wipe out Gorgues. "We can probably mop up your General Yovan too," he suggested.

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Silence fell, and a moon rose in the sky while Petrovich considered these things. A night bird was singing. At last Petrovich spoke.

"You have delivered your whole nation into my hands," he said. "I shall be prepared for the ambush tomorrow, I shall capture Gorgues and tell him of your deceit, and he will wipe you out. I can then wipe him out in my own good time. You have no courage, and so you are defeated before you start! This is the moment of truth, Donikpus, is it not?"

The Illyrian king's teeth flashed in a sneer. "You opportunist, Petrovich! Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown, I say! Those that live by the sword shall die by the sword! Farewell, false king! I'll match you yet!"

Setting spur to his palfrey, he galloped down the long slopes towards the forbidding valley that marked the marches of his kingdom, leaving Petrovich to sit and brood on the hill.

A torrent of confused emotion ran through Petrovich. He recalled all he had said to Branka — and all he had not said; he recalled all he had ever done — and all he had not done; he recalled all he hoped to be — and all he hoped not to be.

The sky was free of cloud now. All the stars shone down, and a comet or two appeared.

Suddenly, Petrovich spurred his horse and galloped down into the valley along the path that the Illyrian king had taken. He had come to a decision.

To his surprise, he saw that Donikpus had stopped, turned about and was riding back. Both men, alarmed by the other's change of plans, drew swords. They charged towards each other at a gallop and met by the rushing Siva River with a clash of metal.

"Halt, then!" cried Donikpus. "It's too late to change your mind, you braggart king! I want my crown no more. I'm a dreamer at heart, not a ruler, I'm off into the mountains among the simple people. I shall grow a beard and become a wandering musician, singing the ballads of my people."

"You can't do that!" Petrovich exclaimed. "I'm tired of kingship, too. Besides, I have a better voice than you!"

"You lie! My voice is the finest in all the coastlands of Illyria!"

"Pah, that pipsqueak voice! Donikpus, you couldn"t keep a baby awake with your singing, and you must die —"

But even as he lunged forward with his silver sword, the king of Illyria lunged forward with his gold one. For a moment, the light of the comets flashed along their deadly blades. Both men grunted almost in unison. Silence fell. Then, very slowly, one king top-

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pled off his horse towards the left stirrup and the other towards the right stirrup. Since they were facing each other, they fell on top of each other and rolled together into the rapid stream, where the wavelets, chill from the heights of the mountain, washed over their sightless eyes.

All this time, Gorgues was carousing in a stimulating fashion inside the limestone mountain, while exciting things were happening to General Yovan in the queen's tent . . . .

Precautions were taken so that participants in play-outs, when leaving the theaters after their roles were done, did not meet any fellow actors. But since these precautions had been arranged by Bernie Burr in the days when he owned half of Ego City, he had small trouble in circumventing them.

So when Lee Rogers Irnstein came to climb into his self-driven limousine, he found a ragged figure waiting for him in the shadows.

"Lee?" Bernie asked huskily. "Say, Lee, I recognized you in there!"

Without thinking, Lee Rogers Irnstein clutched Bernie's hand. "Bernie! I recognized you — after all these years!"

"Several centuries, hasn't it been?" Bernie said dryly.

"Say, I really learnt something about myself in there," Lee Rogers Irnstein said. "Should have gone long ago, like Famagusta said."

"You made a swell Illyrian king," Bernie said. "And you know what I learnt about myself? That I am really happier as I am than as a king or a captain of industry or in any post with responsibility. I could have double-crossed you, but at the last moment I ratted out!"

They both lit Irnstein cigars, and that magnate said, emotion in his voice, "You were a great warrior king, Bernie. I kind of admired that beard of yours. And I liked your Branka, too. Showed good taste."

He was in an uncharacteristically sentimental mood. His death as Donikpus — stabbed by a prop sword made of a wonderful alloy that disintegrated immediately on touching human flesh— had momentarily softened him. Gazing at Bernie, he said, "Know what I learnt about myself? I'm just not destined to be a wandering minstrel or a great musician or any of that stuff. I may think I want to be, but that way spells death for me. In the future, I shall be content with the humbler role of king of the Illyrians. I mean, of course, of Ego City."

A long silence fell, while they leaned against the car.

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"We really got ourselves sorted out in there," Bernie said. "Wonderful form of entertainment we invented between us."

"Say, Bernie, I'm not just saying this, but it really has been swell meeting you again. Like the good old days."

Bernie nodded. Looking cautiously about to see that nobody could overhear them, he said, "Look, Lee, why don't I come and see you in the morning? I've got a little proposition to put to you that could make all the difference to both of us . . . ."

— BRIAN W. ALDISS

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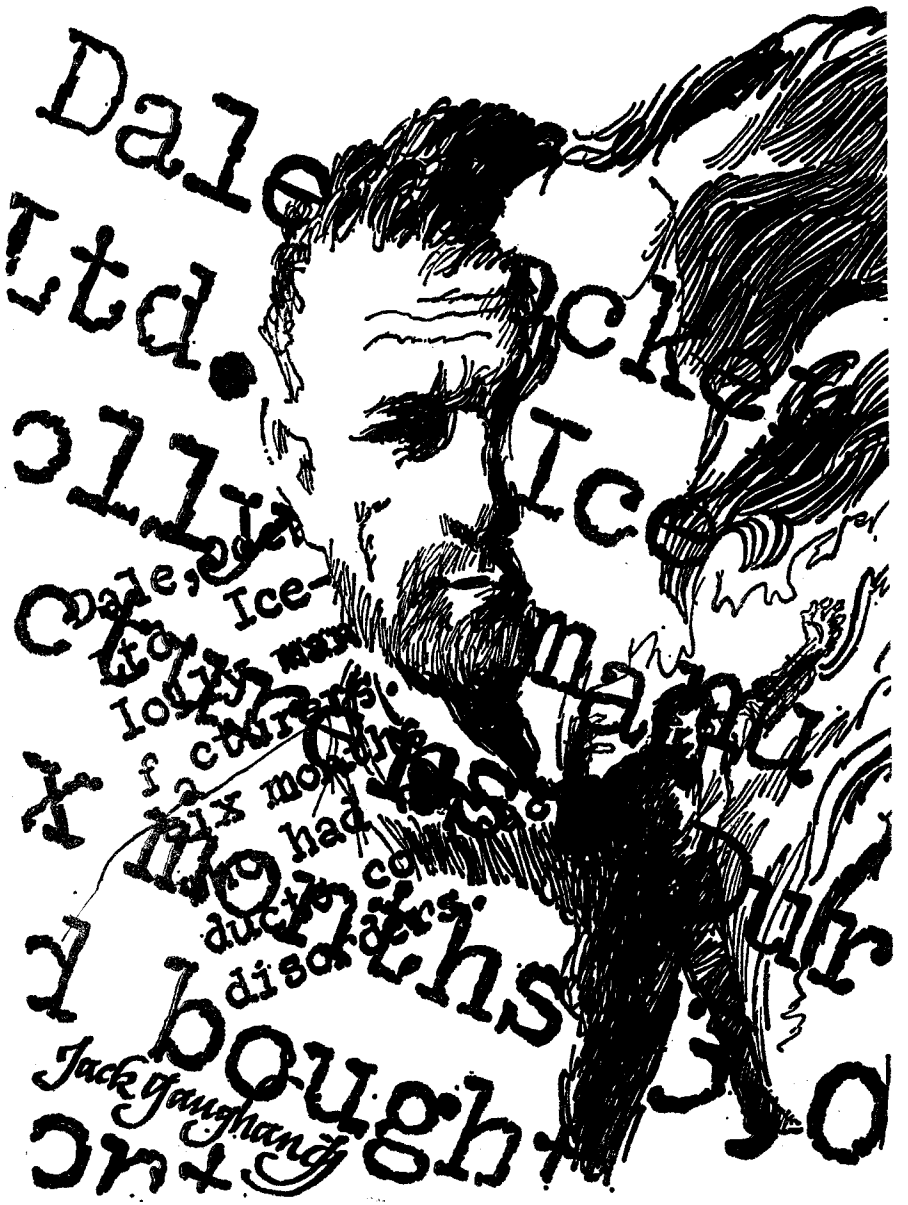

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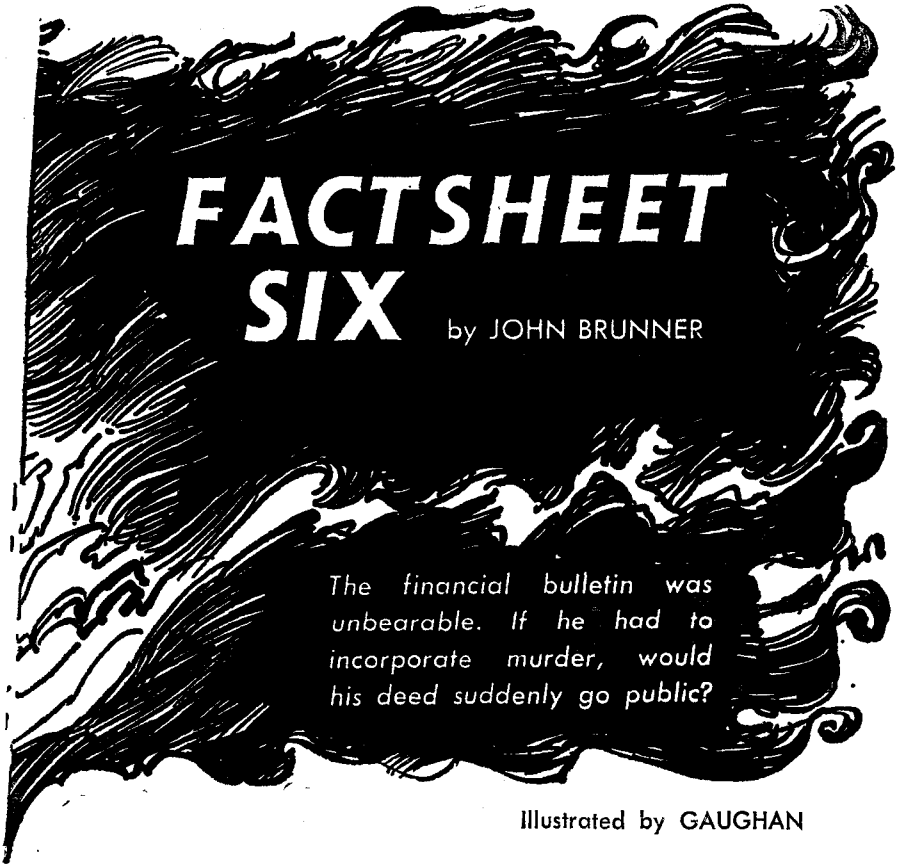

FACTSHEET SIX

by JOHN BRUNNER

The financial bulletin was unbearable. If he had to incorporate murder, would his deed suddenly go public?

Illustrated by GAUGHAN

I

Mervyn Grey, nicknamed the Boy Wonder of the Business World, had not become a millionaire at twenty-nine through indecisiveness.

Accordingly, when he found an overnight memo sent by teleprinter from Edgar Casson, his London deputy, which said Casson counted himself fortunate to have obtained three shillings a share for holdings in a company that yesterday had been quoted at nine shillings and sixpence, he left the Grand Bahama headquarters of his financial empire on the next VC-10.

He hadn't bothered to send

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ahead and say he was coming, but the stolid, heavy-set broker was not surprised when a chauffeur-driven Rolls arrived before his expensive home that evening. He told his wife to entertain the dinner guests on her own, to keep his food warm for later and not to interrupt him on any account, and he himself welcomed Grey in the library.

Short, blond, tense to the point of feverishness, always seeming — even when sitting behind his desk — to be on the point of heading elsewhere at a dead run, Grey dropped into the most comfortable chair, took the fuller of the two glasses of sherry which Casson poured and demanded, "What in hell's name happened to Lupton & White?"

Casson had been anticipating this; but, as usual, having the width of the Atlantic between them had given him an exaggerated impression of his ability to deal calmly with Grey in a bad temper. He licked his lips nervously and said in a defensive tone, "It's still happening, you know. They went through one and sixpence by close of business this afternoon, and tomorrow you won't be able to give them away. Under the circumstances — "

"*What happened?*" Grey said. "And give me another glass of that muck you were conned into buying as sherry."

Casson complied with a sigh. Much of the day he had been mentally rehearsing the explanations he was going to give if Grey turned up, and with considerable polishing he felt he had prepared a rather impressive story: the initial astonishment, the quick reaction which shaved their losses, the discreet pumping of knowledgeable acquaintances, the eventual remarkable discovery . . .

But the hell with it. If he prevaricated, Grey would quite likely fire him. He set down the newly filled glass and reached into the inner pocket of his impeccable dinner jacket.

"*That* happened to them," he said baldly, and thrust a sheet of paper, folded twice, into Grey's outstretched hand.

"*Factsheet Five,*" Grey read aloud from the heading. "What does this have to do with it?"

"Read the whole thing," Casson shrugged. "Then you'll know as much as I do, or anyone else that I've spoken to."

Grey scowled, but did as he was told. What he had been given was a sort of leaflet, produced by photo-offset from a typed original — a badly-typed original, moreover, with irregular margins, many errors and even two or three lines which had been crudely x'ed out. The heading was in bold black Letraset capitals, but even

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that was a sloppy job; and the capital "F" of "Five" was creased at the top.

Altogether there were about ten or a dozen short paragraphs, each prefaced with the name of a company, of which he recognized the majority. With growing anger and bewilderment, he read through them.

Dale, Dockery & Petronelli Ltd. Ice-cream and ice-lolly manufacturers. During the last six months 3,021 *children who had bought their products contracted stomach disorders.*

Grand International Tobacco Corp. "Prestige," "Chilimenth" and "Cachet" cigarettes. 14,186 *of the cases of lung cancer diagnosed last year occurred among users of these brands.*

Scientifically Tested Protectives Ltd. Surgical rubber goods. 20,512 *unwanted pregnancies occurred last year in cases where the parents had relied exclusively on this firm's products.*

And there was the one he'd been looking for: *Lupton & White Ltd. Catering equipment.* 1,227 *employees of firms using bread-slicers, bacon-slicers and other cutting devices supplied by this company lost one or more fingers in the period under review.*

Grey winced and shuddered at the momentary image of a hand spouting blood across the clean white enamel of a bacon-slicer, but he had a twenty-thousand-pound loss on his mind. He looked up at Casson, who had taken a chair facing him and was gloomily piercing a cigar for himself.

"This — this *rag* did for Lupton & White?"

"So I've been told," Casson agreed.

"But — but for heaven's sake!" Grey counted rapidly on both sides of the paper. "There are eleven named companies here. Did anything happen to the others? How about Grand International Tobacco?"

"They launched a new promotion scheme two weeks ago which has already visibly increased their sales. It started an upward trend in their price, too. But, for whatever reason the trend leveled off yesterday, and today they slipped back threepence. I agree, that isn't evidence. But the coincidence is indicative."

"Oh, for the Lord's sake! That happens all the time, that kind of thing; but a nosedive like Lupton & White's is practically unprecedented! How can you argue that a slovenly scrap of paper like this is responsible? And in any case, why this firm in particular, with twelve hundred alleged victims, and not the contraceptive makers with twenty thousand?"

"Because there's no way of get-

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ting back at the firm which landed you with an unwanted baby. But there is a new and very much stiffer Industrial Compensation Bill before Parliament at the moment, which makes the manufacturer as well as the operator of industrial equipment liable if the employee gets hurt. If the performance of last year is repeated next, Lupton & White could be hit for an estimated three hundred thousand in claims, which would wipe out their gross profit — phfft!"

"Re-tooling to cure the problem, make the machines safer?" Grey snapped his fingers. "No, don't bother to answer. They restyled their entire line three years ago, didn't they?"

"And still haven't paid off more than sixty per cent of the loan they obtained to finance the job." Casson gave the words an air of finality. "No, confidence in Lupton & White is nil, and what they can look forward to is bankruptcy. Which is, I suppose, a kind of poetic justice — assuming they really did cost all these people their fingers, or their hands."

"Nonsense!" Grey exclaimed. "Any idiot should know that a sharp cutting instrument is dangerous! So's a pocket-knife — so's a razor-blade, come to that!"

Casson's mouth twisted as though he were amused despite his depression. "The person who puts out that Factsheet is fully aware of that," he said. "You haven't read the other side, have you? Look at — I think it's the last item but one."

Grey turned the paper over. He read aloud, "New Dawn razor-blades were used in 23 of the 28 face-slashing cases known to the police in —" And, breaking off, abruptly, he stared at Casson.

"How in the world could anyone take this rubbish seriously? There must be a lunatic behind it!"

"Someone took it seriously. A lot of people, in fact. The proof is in what happened to Lupton & White, isn't it?"

"No, of course that isn't proof!" Grey jumped up and began to pace the room. "What about all these other companies? I didn't see a simultaneous crash by all of them."

Three of them aren't public companies, so they can be disregarded. And the rest are all subsidiaries of much larger combines, which can cushion the blow."

"But —!" Grey slammed fist into palm furiously, and the Factsheet floated to the floor. Casson bent and recovered it.

"But what, Mr. Grey?"

"But granting that you're right, something ought to be done about it! Isn't this — well — libel, or something?"

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"Apparently not. You can't libel a corporation, only an individual."

"But it's such transparent nonsense!" Grey thundered. "Who in heaven's name could track down — oh, for example, the parents of all these unwanted babies? It's absurd!"

"Absurd or not, I tell you it is taken very seriously by a lot of people. Shall I explain?"

"Yes, go ahead," Grey said wearily, and slumped back into his chair.

"It took me a lot of probing to get hold of that issue of the Factsheet," Casson said. "I called — well, a long-time friend of mine, let's say — while I was trying to find out what had happened to Lupton's, and he said if he'd only realized I had a holding in the firm he'd have tipped me off. I asked how he knew, and he said he'd tell me if I had lunch with him. I did, and that was when he showed me that paper. He told me he had a photostat so I was welcome to have it.

"He said he doesn't know anyone else who receives it, he has no idea why he receives it or who sends it to him. It just arrives, roughly once a month, in a plain envelope and always with a different postmark. He's been getting it since issue number three, which he thought was a crank's ravings and threw away. However, one item did stick in his memory because it referred to a canned-meat company he was interested in, and implied that they were lax in their hygiene. So, superstitiously — to quote his own term — he revised his intention of buying in. A few days later an outbreak of typhoid in Leeds was traced to a canned corned beef shipped by that very firm. Naturally, the bottom dropped out of their sales for three months until the impact of the news faded."

"Go on," Grey said, listening intently.

"Well, next time he received a Factsheet, of course, he read it very carefully. He had no holdings in any of the firms it listed, but he kept an eye on them out of curiosity. One of the entries was similar to this one here, about the ice-cream, and said a lot of children had fallen ill after buying toys imported by Kid Dee Fun. You know them?"

"Of course. Dolls and novelties from Hong Kong and Japan. And they were the firm that ran foul of Consumers' Association."

"Correct," Casson nodded. "There proved to be an arsenical compound in the paint used on some of their dolls, and they had to call in ten thousand pounds' worth and burn them."

"Who the hell was it who told you all this?" Grey demanded.

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"He asked me not to give his name to anyone," Casson murmured. "But — well, I checked on some of the companies he admitted having stock in when I'd left him after lunch, and I can safely estimate that he's worth half a million, so he must be competent and have good judgment. Which I already believed, of course. I'm far too cynical to believe a yarn like this without, as it were, verifying the teller's credentials."

Grey looked at him for a long moment. He said finally, "Has he ever gone for any of the very big companies?"

"I don't know."

"Let me see that leaflet again!" Grey snatched at it and pondered in silence for long moments. At length he said, "I have to give the guy credit. He's smart, isn't he?"

"How do you mean?" Casson countered.

"Oh, come off it!" Grey snorted. "It'd be obvious if you could see beyond the end of your nose! This is a brilliant con job, put out by one of the cleverest market-manipulators I ever heard of. There's a pattern here which gives him away. You honestly don't see it?"

The nervousness which Casson thought he had escaped by convincing Grey of the truth of his assertions returned in full force. Feebly he shook his head.

"In that case you're more gullible than I imagined," Grey snapped. "Maybe I should think about handing my affairs over to someone who isn't going soft in the head with premature senility! Goddamn it, man, think! From what you've told me all these sheets follow a similar pattern. Each includes a kernel of hard fact — the infected meat, the arsenical paint — which could be established by anybody with access to the right channels of information. I'm willing to bet I could compile a list of twenty damaging facts off the top of my head which I could use against as many different companies with household brand-names! Then I could invent lots more, dressed up with statistics, which could neither be verified nor disproved but which would take color from their surroundings. And I'll bet that's what he's doing, whoever he is. And *then* I could salt the whole lot with an item about a company which is peculiarly vulnerable, like Lupton & White. Result: the ultimate in inside market information, the self-fulfilling prophecy."

Casson said, "Yes, but — "

"But what?" Grey waited an instant, then added, "Oh, come on, come on! What's your opinion of the man who puts this col-

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lection of nonsense together?"

"Well —"

"A public benefactor, drawing attention to products which make people ill, chop their fingers off, kill them in accidents? In that case why doesn't he attack big companies with a staff who could follow up his charges? Directly or indirectly I control a labor force of sixty thousand, don't I? I could hire a hundred more and set them to work tomorrow if I had to, checking out the claim that umpty-dozen cars riding on Ultrac Tires were involved in accidents last month, or however many housewives were drowned in Miracle Whirl washing-machines."

"And would you?" Casson said.

"Would I what?"

"Would you hire the people to check the claims? When the car-testers reported that Ultracs skidded more easily and were more likely to come away from the rim of the wheel when cornering at speed —"

"I did sweet Fanny Adams about it. Correct. How in hell could I? Any tire will misbehave if you treat it badly enough! And things went on exactly as before, didn't they? Ultracs sell well because they're cheap and well advertised. All this consumer-testing nonsense affects maybe a hundred thousand buyers in this whole country, and there are millions over and beyond those few who want what I'm giving them. These are hard commercial facts, Casson. I didn't invent the market, and no more can I be held responsible for the people it consists of. You haven't answered my question: did you honestly picture the publisher of this Factsheet as a knight in shining armor, crusading against dangerous consumer goods? No, you couldn't be *that* naive."

Hideously embarrassed, Casson felt himself begin to flush under the lashing scorn of Grey's tongue. Not for the first time he wondered how much longer he could stand working for this — this *youth*. He himself was over fifty, almost twice Grey's age, experienced, successful, highly regarded in his own field. Yet there was something about Grey which could make him cringe, want to curl up inside himself and go a long way away very quickly. Perhaps it was what the admiring gossip columnists had no qualms about terming ruthlessness; perhaps it was just that his unashamed greed made him acutely sensitive to the greed of the people who bought the products he offered. It had begun with household durables, and the discovery that people resented having to pay so much for the equipment to perform unglamorous chores like

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doing the laundry, yet felt forced to acquire high-priced, high-precision equipment for them because that act itself loaned the work a smidgin of glamour.

That led to knocked-down washing machines, assembled in half an hour with a screwdriver — supplied. The result was handsome; he hired good designers to package his products. From there he went on to other expensive items for the home, likewise in kit form, and thence to the car, the next highest investment in the family budget. First there were things to make a routine vehicle look like a custom-built modification, and then there was the major breakthrough into the tire business, following the discovery that drivers resented having to pay so much for equipment no one but experts would notice and comment on and would rather fit a sun-visor and a windtone horn than a new set of high-performance tires.

And so on, in a fantastic pyramid. There had been nothing like it since John Bloom's meteoric rise, and unlike his predecessor Mervyn Grey showed no sign of over-reaching himself. Even the loss on Lupton & White would be absorbed by a holding company worth ten times as much.

What next?

He grew aware that Grey was staring at him sardonically and fished back in memory for the echo of the last thing that had been said to him.

"Well — ah, no! I don't suppose I did picture whoever is responsible for the Factsheet as a 'crusader.'" Recovering rapidly from his moment of dismay, he ploughed on. "On the other hand, he must have a bee in his bonnet, don't you think? Perhaps he suffers from misplaced idealism."

Grey considered the suggestion, his expression becoming more cordial. "I think not, though it's a rational possibility. A monomaniac obsessed with things like safety, the health of children and so on would be more likely to let fly wildly at the big corporations, as I said before. No, this has all the earmarks of a cunning, thoroughly planned campaign. So let's take advantage of it."

He leaned back in his chair and put his fingertips together. "I want you to do two things. First, buy Lupton & White."

"What? But I told you — they're headed for bankruptcy!"

"Blockhead! I don't mean take them over direct! I mean sweep up a good fat majority holding. Who financed their restyling the other year — one of the merchant banks, was it? Well, it doesn't matter. Whoever did it won't want the company to go bust. They'll become the effective controllers of what assets survive,

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and if the property won't cover their outlay they'll listen to a scheme for recovery, won't they? This Industrial Compensation Bill won't become law next week, for heaven's sake! We can dump any stocks of dangerous products — export 'em at cost, if we have to. There's bound to be some ignorant nignog somewhere who'd like to pretty up his jungle grocery store with a nice new slicing machine! Hell, why should I have to spell out the details to you of all people? A change of title and the magic of the name 'Mervyn Grey,' and we can have the firm back where it was inside a couple of years. All what's wrong is that you panicked and dumped our holdings, so now we're going to have to buy it back, aren't we?"

Casson said, "But when it started to slide so fast —"

"You stuck to rigid principles instead of using a bit of imagination. Ah, never mind. With luck we'll come out in one piece after all. But you're going to have to make up for it, you know, Cassie-boy!"

"Don't call me that!" Casson snapped.

"Why not?" Grey's tone was a savage caress. "When you behave like somebody years my junior, can I help thinking of you as an inexperienced teen-ager? Shut up, anyway — I don't want to spend longer than I can help in this chilly damp country. The other thing you're going to have to do to make up for your mistake is find me the person who publishes that." He stabbed his finger through the air towards the Factsheet. "He's got something going for him. I'd like to have it going for me. Never let it be said that I can't recognize an original idea, especially when it pays this kind of conspicuous dividends."

He rose and headed for the door. "You've got until the next issue comes out, Cassie-boy," he threw over his shoulder. "Otherwise you're through. 'Bye!"

II

The more Grey thought about it, the more he was impressed with the brilliant simplicity of the Factsheet idea. If, in the space of a few short months, the man behind it had built up such a fund of confidence as to take in Casson — who, for all Grey's gibes, was extremely competent — and Casson's anonymous friend and at least several score other people with substantial holdings in Lupton & White, since otherwise the price-slide would not have been so swift or so complete, then he had a remarkable gift for exploiting gullibility. It was Grey's lifetime conviction that the mass of the world's population were idiots. Finding someone else who had ar-

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rived at the same conclusion and benefited from his insight was enough to make him decide that that person was going to be useful.

Day by day little snippets of information arrived across the ocean from London which enabled him to round out his picture of the mysterious market manipulator. He began to think of him as a financial counterpart of a gypsy fortune teller, not merely because he used the standard technique of slipping in the crucial item among a fog of carefully chosen irrelevancies to give the whole a phoney air of precision by employing those incredible statistics, but also because of the ingenious misdirection he had adopted from the start when presenting his monthly bulletins.

If he had issued something slick and professional, people would at once have associated him with the regular market information agencies. Instead, he took the risk of having his material dismissed as the drivel of an incompetent amateur and banked on luck supplying him with a small hard core of people who had actually read some single item closely enough to remember it when the prediction it contained was fulfilled. With Casson's friend, it had been the canned-meat company; doubtless with many more "clients" it had been the affair of the poisonous toys. Then, next time one of the Factsheets turned up . . .

"Neat," Grey said to the air. And added: "I want that man! What the hell is Casson playing at?"

For, though information was coming in almost daily, it still summed up to nothing useful. Other people had been found who received the sheets, always anonymously, always in plain envelopes and never with the same postmark twice. They were clearly hand-picked. They included people who handled the investment program for unit trusts and some of the biggest insurance companies, the flywheels of the stock market, but not only such — also there were key men in the distribution of consumer products, like the head buyers for chain stores, procurement directors for car accessory dealers and service stations, the chairmen of export agencies handling millions of pounds' worth of British goods every year.

But they were in close enough contact with the financial world to learn quickly about the accuracy of the warnings which appeared in the shabby little mailings they received out of the blue.

Watching the course of the companies named in the sheet Casson had given him, Grey detected the shadow of what had happened to Lupton & White in

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the gradual decline of Grand International Tobacco over the next couple of weeks, in the reversion of a former slow rise in another company, in the sudden cancellation of a takeover bid for yet a third.

On the spur of the moment he called Casson direct and learned little enough for his pains. The envelopes in which the Factsheets arrived were the largest-selling brand in the country; the paper they were printed on was made by the largest mills; the typewriter was a discontinued model and could be one of several thousand still in use. Listening to the flow of excuses, he grew suddenly angry.

"You have one more week!" he rapped. "If I'm not on the mailing list for Factsheet Six, I've finished with you — is that clear?"

There was a moment of silence. At length Casson cleared his throat.

"Well, there is one thing it occurred to me you could do," he said. "I hesitated to suggest it, but . . ."

"What is it?"

"You could advertise, perhaps? Say in the *Financial Times*? I'm certain the — ah — the publisher must read the financial press very closely."

Grey was on the point of declaring that it was a ridiculous idea, when he checked the words and reconsidered. In sober fact the points Casson had mentioned, like the commonness of the materials used to prepare the Factsheets, did imply that it would be hard to breach the wall of anonymity surrounding the publisher. And he did want to find that man. He wanted it so much it was becoming an obsession. He kept finding himself daydreaming of the ways in which he could exploit the reputation the Factsheets now enjoyed to drag down the price of companies and let him buy into them, reorganize them and put them back on the market under new names sponsored by what he referred to as his "magic."

But he was too impatient merely to copy the idea and start his own monthly bulletin along similar lines. He wanted the fund of goodwill — or rather, gullibility — the existing version had established. Hence he wanted the mailing-list.

Casson said, "I thought we should put a few anonymous advertisements in other places, too, like —"

"Anonymous?" Grey cut in. "Hell, no! Are you determined to undermine the good impression made by your occasional fits of insight? Why anonymous? If it's known that Mervyn Grey is interested in the Factsheet, this is

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going to give the guy the kind of cachet he's after, isn't it? It'll probably drive the last of the skeptics into his net. He'd love me for that! Yes, go ahead and place those ads at once!"

III

Six days later the morning mail included a note typed on half a sheet of plain white paper, in an ordinary airmail envelope addressed to "Mr. Mervyn Grey, Mervyn Grey Enterprises, Grand Bahama Island." It ran, curtly enough:

I understand you are interested in the forthcoming issue of my Factsheet. Well you might be. I shall be pleased to show you a copy personally. If you call, however, do so by yourself.

At the top there was an address, in a small town several miles north of London. At the bottom there was a name — George Handling. And not only was the typeface the same as that of the Factsheet, but so was the clumsy use of the machine, with a good half-dozen errors in the few lines of the note.

Jubilantly Grey told his secretary to get him on a flight to England as soon as possible. He was about to instruct her to put a call in to Casson as well, when he changed his mind. Even though the man's idea of advertising for the Factsheet's publisher had paid dividends, it had taken an unconscionable time. Casson, he decided, was due to be discarded in favor of somebody younger and more enterprising, and it would be better to provoke him into resigning than to dismiss him openly. Best of all, of course, would be "retirement" — not to salve Casson's feelings, because he regarded people who couldn't protect themselves as a liability and would not go out of his way to help them, but simply because it would do an inescapable minimum of damage to the image of his financial empire if the outside world were allowed to detect an internal disagreement.

So let it work this way, he decided: he would go to England without telling anyone he was coming; he would make his way to the home, or office, or whatever it was, of this Mr. Handling, and he would make him a proposition — a very good one. He might even offer him Casson's post, in due time, if his other talents matched his skill in exploiting credulity. It was going to take a person of unusual ingenuity to make the most of the new vistas that control over the Factsheet was opening up.

There had to be lavish tips, of course: to the airline's staff, to ensure no one mentioned his arrival to the gossip columnists —

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almost every time he went to England he found a couple of journalists waiting for him — then, on arrival, to the ground staff at the airport so that he did not have to appear publicly among the passengers in the customs hall, and still later to the car-hire firm from whom he rented a small inconspicuous family sedan.

He was, however, reasonably content with his precautions when he picked his way around the northern fringes of London under a dull autumnal sky which occasionally shed a half-hearted drizzle on him. Tomorrow, or the next day, when Casson called with the latest of his useless scraps of information, it would be a real pleasure to announce that he had already been to see the man who published the Factsheets and had closed a favorable deal with him. That would be the first of a series of carefully chosen wounds intended to compel Casson's eventual resignation. It would work. He had done it often enough before.

Despite the gloominess of the afternoon he began to whistle as he drove along.

On reaching the small town which was his destination, however, he grew puzzled. He had expected to find the street named on the letter he carried at the center of the town; in his experience, even though businessmen decentralized away from the metropolis, they liked to centralize in the places they moved to. After much aimless driving back and forth, he asked a pedestrian and was directed to the outskirts, to a drab postwar housing development lacking all character and all charm. At the end of a cul-de-sac he found a large bungalow with one lighted window, the garden before it overgrown with weeds, the door of the adjacent garage wide open to reveal that there was no car inside.

But the street bore the right name, and the right number was on the gatepost.

Grey parked the car and got out slowly. This low-income neighborhood, this badly-maintained house with its wild garden, did not fit his preconceived idea of the brilliant inventor of the Factsheets. Could he have been hoaxed? He reminded himself that the letter he had received was clearly from the same typewriter as the Factsheets, shrugged and walked up the path, noticing that it was concreted where one might have expected gravel and that the weeds had been cut back along its edges.

It was full dark by now, and the nearest street-lamp was too far away to illuminate the front door of the bungalow. He went the last few feet cautiously, not

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wanting to trip over a step. There was no step. That struck him as peculiar, but he couldn't decide why. It was probably not significant, anyway.

He felt across the door jamb until he located a bell and pushed it. Shortly an overhead light went on, and the door was opened for him.

"Yes?" a voice said, and then, changing instantly to a tone he could not decipher: "Ah, it's Mr. Mervyn Grey, isn't it? Come in, please. It's cold and nasty out, isn't it?"

Staring, he failed to respond for a moment. He hated to be at a loss, but this — this creature who had appeared before him was so totally askew from the mental pictures he had conjured up that he was astounded.

He was in a wheelchair, to begin with — a battery-operated wheelchair with controls on the right arm rest. His left arm was shriveled, and the hand twisted, doubled back almost at right angles to the wrist. His legs were concealed under a gray blanket spotted with gravy marks and a smear of egg yolk. Above a woollen shirt with a button missing, half his face was covered with an untidy brown beard, but the other half was a smooth keloid, almost purple, reaching from cheekbone to jaw. Both the eyes, however, were alert and piercing, and under their intent gaze he grew uncomfortable.

"Are you George Handling?" he forced out.

"That's right," the man in the wheelchair nodded.

"The person who publishes the Factsheets?"

"Yes! Look, don't just stand there — you'll make the house cold if I have to keep the door open, and heating is bloody expensive these days."

But I should have thought you made enough from using the Factsheets to —

Grey bit the words back. Numbed by the possibility that all his deductions had been false, and he had merely stumbled across a lunatic after all, he stepped inside and now had a chance to survey his surroundings. This was the most peculiar house he had ever been in. The reason for not having a step at the front door had been instantly clear when Handling appeared in his chair, but the logic of that went all through his home. The internal walls had been knocked away, giving an open plan complete, except for what he guessed must be a bathroom at the back. There was a bed in one place, with a curtain which could be drawn around it; there were cases of books in another, a desk with a typewriter on it in another, a lithographing press in another,

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stacks of paper and big cartons of envelopes nearby.

Moving with the automatic jerkiness of a puppet, he followed Handling across the open floor towards the desk. There was a large paraffin stove burning there, of the convector-radiant type with a hot wire mesh glowing in the middle of a chromed reflector, but despite that and despite what Handling had said about shutting the door to keep the place warm the house was very cold.

Or was the feeling subjective, due to shock.

"Sit down," Handling said, swinging his chair expertly around so that it cleared the stove by inches. He tilted his head towards a chair with papers and a tea cup on it. "Sorry you have to move all those things, but I can't have things on the floor — they get in my way, for one thing, and I can't reach to pick them up, for another. I have to go and get my tongs if I drop something. Well! I suppose I ought to offer you a drink, oughtn't I? Only I haven't any. One doesn't get much pleasure out of it in my condition. I could make you a cup of tea, if you like."

Grey had found a place for the cup and papers on the end of the desk and had taken a little longer than necessary in arranging them there, just in case there was a sample entry from the next Factsheet to be seen. But there was nothing — only a stack of blank paper and half a dozen handwritten letters, upside down.

"No — ah — no thank you," he said, forcing himself towards normality. "I suppose I should really have let you know when to expect me, but . . . Well, to be frank, your Factsheets have impressed me so much that the moment I knew where to find you I just dropped everything."

"Oh, there was no need to warn me of your arrival," Handling said, and chuckled. "No need at all. I could say I'm flattered at your taking the trouble to fly the Atlantic just to call on me, but I doubt if there's any need for that, either."

Grey's eyes roved the monstrous room into which the house had been converted, spotting here and there among the general bachelor disarray of shirts hung on chair-backs and stacks of old newspapers things which gave some anchor of credence to Handling's identity. He recognized the familiar red cover of the British Industrial Annual, a number of commercial directories, publicity material and prospectuses from various large companies of which he himself had copies in his office on Grand Bahama. He said, almost at random and to cover his inquisitiveness, "Well, you'll have

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gathered from our advertisements that I'm most interested in your publication."

"Advertisements?" Handling said.

Grey blinked at him and immediately had to look away again — the sight of that fungoid patch of scar-tissue among the unkempt beard threatened to turn his stomach.

"Why, of course! That was why you wrote to me, wasn't it? We advertised in the *Financial Times* and the *Economist* and . . ." The words trailed away, and he stared around the house again. Nowhere was there a sign, among all the heaps of old newspapers, of the conspicuous pink of the *Financial Times*.

"Oh, I wouldn't know about that," Handling said, with an abortive attempt at a shrug which struck Grey as rather horrible.

"Then how did you know I was interested in your work?"

"It's a trade secret, Mr. Grey," Handling said, and gave a noise closer to a simper than a chuckle. "You've seen at least one of my productions, haven't you? Then you know I have a great many trade secrets."

Grey was conducting a furious debate with himself. An unclean cripple in a wheelchair was so far from the image he had mentally created of a gifted and prosperous market manipulator that he was half-minded to dismiss Handling as the crank he had at first assumed, when Casson showed him Factsheet Five. Yet there was incontestably a fund of credulity, tapped by Handling, which he could exploit if he had the chance. He would have to be tactful. Even if the man proved to have been deranged by his awful condition, he could be used.

"Yes, they impressed me enormously," he said, forcing warmth into his voice. He linked his fingers together, realized he had forgotten to take off his driving-gloves and decided against removing them now because the house still felt bitterly cold. "Inside information like yours could be worth a fortune, handled in the proper way. In fact — Well, never mind that."

"You were probably going to say you're surprised to find the possessor of it living in a jerry-built bungalow in an ugly development on the fringe of a dull, little provincial town," Handling said. His tone was quite unemotional. "But it's easier to keep out of people's way here, Mr. Grey. And besides, I no longer have any use for a fortune. I had a wife. I had a son. They both died in the accident which reduced me to this state."

"I — I'm sorry," Grey said.

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thank you for being sorry."

There didn't seem to be any way to follow up that remark. Casting about for a way to change the subject, Grey said, "But you must have some purpose in publishing these bulletins of yours. Or is it just a hobby?"

"It's more than a hobby. It's practically a full-time occupation. Compiling the information is a slow job in itself, and then there's the business of making the litho plate and running off the actual sheets and addressing all the envelopes . . . Oh, it keeps me very well occupied."

"I see." Grey licked his lips. "How do you manage to have the sheets sent from so many different places? I don't imagine you mail them yourself."

"Oh no. There's a commercial service which collects them and takes them anywhere I choose within a hundred miles for quite a small fee. I thought I'd muddle the trail a little until I was ready to show myself."

"You — ah — you have a big mailing list now?"

"I started off with five hundred, picked more or less at random," Handling said. "This month it will be over a thousand."

"No wonder it keeps you busy! Ah . . . I'd have appreciated being included in the list myself, by the way."

"Oh, you aren't at all the sort of person I aimed it at," Handling exclaimed. "I worked it all out very carefully. There are certain key figures in the financial world of this country, and you can find out who they are if you put lots of little bits of published information together. It took me several months to make my list up, but that was all right. I had plenty of time on my hands. Or rather, on my *hand*." He picked up the limp left one with the live right and regarded it curiously, as though he had come upon a dead frog in the garden. "I selected people administering the very big investment funds, people concerned with important exports, people responsible for choosing the brands of goods which are sold in the biggest chain stores all over the country, and so on. People whose decision to accept or not to accept a company's products could make or break the company, you see?"

Grey gave a cautious nod. "And why did you choose *them* in particular?" he ventured.

"Oh, because of the kind of information I was getting," Handling said. "They seemed to me to be the people who ought to be told what I knew. You've seen the sort of stuff I get!"

"Ah — yes, of course I have. But why *that* information? How do you come by it?"

"I'm a psychometrist. Psycho-

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metry is a branch of clairvoyance. Actually I think the whole thing is all part of an all-embracing talent which will eventually be fully revealed to us, but that's by the way. I get odd extras every now and then — the curtain lifts, as the saying goes. Sometimes I can glimpse the future, sometimes I can deduce or sense what a person is thinking, but my specialty is being able to work out from objects their associations with injury and death."

IV

What a farrago of nonsense. All Grey's enthusiasm for getting hold of the Factsheet mailing list evaporated on the instant. He got to his feet.

"Well, thank you very much, Mr. Handling. I'm sorry to have taken up your time. However, if you're really restricting your mailing list to — "

"Oh, really, Mr. Grey!" Handling cut in. "You didn't honestly come all the way from the Bahamas just for five minutes' chat and not even a peek at Factsheet Six, did you?" He added after a fractional pause, "This one is devoted to firms you'd be especially interested in."

Grey wavered. On the one hand, the cripple was certainly a crank; on the other, he had certainly influenced the market.

"Yes, I should like to look at number six," he admitted.

"I thought so!" Handling crowed and moved his wheelchair around the desk, once more missing the paraffin stove by a fraction. He tugged open a drawer and peered in.

"Unfortunately it looks as though I only have spoiled copies left," he went on. "Yes, that's a spoiled one, and that's blank on one side, and . . . . Never mind, it won't take a moment to put the second side on it. I still have the plate on the machine."

Dexterously he headed for the litho press. His deftness with only one hand, Grey admitted silently, was admirable, although everything he had to do was necessarily slow. He waited impatiently; meanwhile Handling, disinclined to hurry, chatted away.

"Yes, this talent of mine I suppose must always have been with me, at least in rudimentary form. For example, I never wanted to buy that washing machine which chopped my little boy's hand off; but of course it was a lot cheaper than all the others, and we weren't exactly rolling in money, so I gave in. And I had my doubts about the sewing machine, too, but Meg couldn't go out to work for a long while after the — "

"Did you say your son lost his hand?" Grey said in a dead voice.

"Why, yes. The washing ma-

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chine wasn't fitted with one of those automatic brakes, you see, so you could have the what'sit going round while the lid was open; and without any water in it, it spun amazingly fast, and poor little Bobby managed to turn it on and lift the lid, and . . . Ah, here we go now, or rather in a moment when the thing's warmed up. Yes, like I was saying: Meg couldn't go out to work for a long while after the soleplate of her iron fell on her thigh and the burn turned septic — not much of an iron, but it was very cheap, of course — and then the sewing machine she'd bought to make a little extra at home ran wild and stitched across the palm of her hand, and it was while I was driving her to the hospital that it happened. The tires on the car, you see. I had my doubts about those as well; but we were pretty skint, what with Meg not going out to work, so I had to settle for what I could afford when it was absolutely essential to get new tires, and there was Meg crying and nursing her hand, and Bobby on the back seat squalling because he didn't have a hand to nurse any more, you see, and . . . Ah, here's your copy now. Complete."

He rolled back across the floor to a spot directly facing Grey and held out the piece of paper, boldly headed FACTSHEET SIX.

Mechanically Grey took it, but didn't look down. His eyes were riveted on Handling's face. He heard himself say, "So — what happened?"

"According to the policeman who explained at the inquest, those tires tend to spring away from the wheel-rim when you go round a corner fast, and of course this lets all the air out — they're tubeless, you understand — and the car just went completely out of control. Smashed into a lamp standard. Meg and Bobby were lucky, I suppose. Certainly I couldn't have done much to support them in this condition. But it was while I was laid up in the hospital that I began to discover my talent. All of a sudden one day when I was being given an injection I said, 'The last man who had a shot from that one died, didn't he?' And they thought I was just being morbid, but I felt sure. So I started following it up. And what I found was that I could — well — *sense* when I took hold of something whether it, or anything like it, was going to hurt someone.

"At first I could only get snatches, but I had lots of time, especially before I got this chair and had to wait in bed for someone to attend me. The worst snag was that I thought the things I was detecting had already happened, so I was sort of straining

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the wrong way into time to get at them. I can't make it very clear, I'm afraid. It doesn't happen to many people.

"Then I suddenly realized that I was feeling forward — not backward — and I got the hang of it, properly. Mark you, it could never be a quick job, working out one of these things. Sometimes, especially with the real mass-production items, I spent up to thirty-six hours struggling before I sorted it out and could afford to go to sleep and rest up."

Almost hypnotized by Handling's sudden burning intensity, Grey could not drag his eyes away from the ruined face straight ahead of him. He said, "What — what exactly is it you do?" And reflected with paradoxical detachment that it was a change for him to be dominated, however briefly. He told himself he was putting up with it, though, because he wanted to be completely convinced that the man was out of his mind. Otherwise he might suffer from the pangs of disappointment.

"It's more sort of what I did," Handling explained in a thoughtful tone. "I told you — when I first started sensing that the other things which matched what I was holding would hurt such-and-such a number of people I thought this was what had already taken place. But I found out that sometimes the thing I'd picked on was too new to have done all that, so then I realized the truth. I could sense what was going to happen. Oh, no doubt you'll say how could I be sure? Well, I couldn't, could I? Not until I'd checked up. So I noted down everything I thought was exact, and whenever I got the chance I cross-referenced my notes. Like the Consumers' Association tests were very helpful, when they said that something I'd worked on was unusually dangerous, and sometimes I found things in the paper about food-poisoning and toys being dangerous to children and so on. After about a year or so, I was absolutely certain I was right."

"Oh, but this is ridiculous!" Grey forced out. "How could you know about — well, twenty thousand unwanted children, to take a really far-fetched example?"

"The numbers sort of add up in my subconscious," Handling said. "I lie awake at night, and I can feel them ticking away in my head. When they stop, I can feel how long they'll take to reach that total — three months, six months, a year. And then I write it all down. When the time is up, I put it into my current Factsheet and off it goes to all these people. I did think of other ways of spreading the news, but I decided they wouldn't work so well.

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I mean, the newspapers are controlled by the advertisers, aren't they? And the consumer journals have their own tests and their own way of going about it. Not as good as mine, but there it is. And they're definitely taking notice now. Especially since — you *did* say, didn't you, that you'd advertised to get in touch with me?"

"Yes." Grey bit the word off short, like the snap of wire-cutters.

"You could tell it was you, from the advertisements?"

"Yes!" Grey felt the prickle of sweat inside his clothes. How could he have imagined that this house was cold and have kept on his coat, his gloves and scarf? It was boiling in here!

"Well, that certainly ought to convince everyone that I'm worth paying attention to," Handling said smugly. The virtual echo of his own remark to Casson galled Grey.

"It's a load of garbage!" he exclaimed. "Taking hold of something and saying that during the next year it's going to hurt or kill so many people — you must be insane! And this Factsheet of yours is nothing more than a grandiose confidence trick!"

"You may not believe me, Mr. Grey," Handling said softly. "But the best part of a thousand people are going to when they open their mail tomorrow morning. The mailing company collected Factsheet Six this afternoon, and it's on it's way. Aren't you even curious to know what's in it this time?"

Grey raised the hand which held his copy, intending to ball it up and march out, but from the corner of his eye he spotted three words that petrified him: *Mervyn Grey Enterprises.* Horrified, he read down the page.

Miracle Whirl washing-machines electrocuted so many people through faulty wiring, started so many domestic fires, leaked and flooded so many homes, bringing down the ceilings on the floor below; Ee-Zee-Smoothe irons started other fires, came apart in use and burned the user; cars shod with Ultrac tires were involved in so many fatal accidents . . .

His head was ringing as he thought of the people to whom this list of accusations was going and the buying power they controlled and the markets they could slam the door on. He barely heard Handling say, "Yes, it was a Miracle Whirl which cost my boy his hand, and one of your irons that kept Meg at home so she had to try and make money sewing with one of your machines which stabbed her hand, and it was Ultrac tires I had to buy and

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which wrecked the car while I was rushing her to the hospital. You have more than just blood on your hands, Mr. Grey. You have all kinds of suffering. You seem to have hurt at least one person for every day of your life."

"You bastard," Grey whispered. He thrust the leaflet into the side pocket of his overcoat. "You can't do this! It's libel — it's a filthy, dirty, stinking *libel!*"

"There's no libel about saying that a product is faulty," Handling said and grinned. "Oh, you could certainly sue me! I suppose I've committed a civil tort. But I haven't committed any kind of *crime.*"

"You smug devil!" Grey roared, and hurled himself bodily forward. Cripple or no cripple, he *had* to wipe that grin off Handling's face!

But the impact drove Handling's wheelchair backward, and it rammed straight into the paraffin stove, and knocked it over and spilled a sea of blazing oil instantly over thirty square feet of the floor. Flames soared up, high as Handling's head. There was a sudden image seared into Grey's retinas, a distorted face with eyes perfectly round, mouth open in a choking gasp that drew in sterile oxygenless air, beard crisping and hair writhing like Medusa's snakes —

And he was out of the house, and the door was shut behind him, and he was running for his car. He jumped in, started the engine, accelerated wildly down the road. Just before he turned out of sight, he glanced back. As yet, there was no sign of fire from outside the house; the curtains were drawn against the cold autumn night, and so were everyone else's on the street. That fact too became a still image in memory, like a stopped movie.

V

Forty miles away, on a lonely roadside, he stopped the car again. Shivering, yet beginning to recover his self-possession, he drove himself to rational examination of his situation. It wasn't so bad — was it now? He could hardly conceal the fact of being in England altogether, but there was no reason at all for it to be known that he'd visited Handling's hometown. He'd spoken to exactly one person, to ask directions — but he'd done so at dusk, from the shadowy interior of a car identical to thousands of others. Long before anyone noticed that Handling's home was burning, he had been well clear of the town, perhaps over the county border. He concentrated on the memory of the deserted street. Yes, it could have been a

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long while before anyone noticed the fire!

And no one had seen him arrive, or leave, and that minor miracle of not taking off his gloves meant he could have left no fingerprints, and he could go quietly back to London, to the apartment which was always ready for him to walk into without notice, and he could go out nonchalantly to a club where he was known and have dinner and watch a good cabaret, and tomorrow morning at about ten o'clock he could let it be discreetly known in circles where it counted that this time the Factsheet was a tissue of lies and the financial empire of Mervyn Grey Enterprises was in no danger, no danger at all, and —

The Factsheet!

Frantically he fumbled in the pocket of his coat and drew out the bit of paper. This was the only thing to link him with Handling. He must get rid of it at once. On the point of winding down the window and throwing it out, he canceled the movement and instead took out his lighter. In another minute this could be anonymous wind-blown ashes, and he would be safe. Oh yes, and the letter from Handling, of course! Lord! Had anyone seen that, in the Grand Bahama office? Well, then: just in case, he could walk into Casson's office in the morning, saying he'd been too tired to go straight there this afternoon, and announce his intention of visiting Handling . . . Yes, that way would be all right, too. He'd be perfectly safe. Even if people believed the Factsheet and he lost a lot of money, he still had the talent which had made him the Boy Wonder of the Business World. He could survive.

Snapping the lighter, he held the copy of Factsheet Six towards its flame. The instant before igniting it, he stopped dead. This time, he was looking at the second side of the sheet. He was looking at a paragraph bordered with black lines, inaccurately hand-drawn with a wide felt pen.

Inside the border, in Handling's usual bad typing, it said:

This is the last issue of Factsheet. The publisher, Mr. George Handling of 29 Wyebird Close, Blentham, was murdered yesterday by Mr. Mervyn Grey in an attempt to stop this information being circulated.

He sat there for a long time thinking of a thousand people of great influence opening the plain envelopes which would arrive in tomorrow morning's mail. When he had finished thinking about it, he just sat.

— JOHN BRUNNER

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Galaxy Bookshelf

by ALGIS BUDRYS

You know, some day it won't matter how many books Isaac Asimov wrote. That is, it won't matter whether a given reader does or does not enjoy the given Asimov book he happens to be reading. The dust wrappers, with their foolish blurbs, will be gone, and the books will be in sturdy library rebinds, nearly in-

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distinguishable from other volumes by other individuals . . . except by their content. This is an important fact, and you should make every effort to grasp it despite the shouting and huckstering in the blurb copy now. Because some day, sure as God made little apples, long after you and I are gone, Maggie, someone will pick up a copy of *Pebble in The Sky* and look beyond the intergalactic politics to the story of the aging little Chicago tailor whirled away from his own time and caught in the middle of them. He will think of Asimov as the author of *that* book, the creator of *that* character, and he will read other Asimov in search of earlier and later echoes of that plangent crystallization. Beyond the robots and Hari Selden he will find The Mule, and he will find Dr. Wendell Urth.

Four of the thirteen short stories in *Asimov's Mysteries* (Doubleday) are about Urth (and his stooge, H. Seton Davenport), and several others could have been.

Dr. Urth is a funny man wearing funny hats, an "extraterrologist" stuck with dozens of tics in addition to that misnomer, a reasoning being who has to put up with people who all the time think it strange an expert on affairs extraterrestrial should be a sedentary agoraphobe. Urth of course makes perfect sense; it is the world, as represented by the common social order, that is mad as only the half-educable can make it. I suspect there is an obvious reason why he is so good at catching antisocials at long distance. He simply puts himself in their place.

Worse than any other task to which he's called, he has to play a sort of balding Sherlock Holmes in the stories which mention him here. These are all rather contrived and not particularly entertaining tales. They demonstrate that a sufficiently educated and intelligent man can attempt to do anything. They do not demonstrate he will succeed gracefully.

If Asimov, or anyone else, were ever to succeed in attaining that amalgam which this book claims for itself, he would have succeeded in entering through two doors simultaneously. I realize Isaac could now, easily, without straining surface logic, write a story whose central character achieves simultaneity. But that would only prove my point.

My point is that this arbitrary collection of thirteen stories — this chautaqua — contains some fine individual divertissements — "Pate de Foie Gras," for example, is a humor article disguised as a detailed report on the physiology of a goose laying golden eggs. Or "The Billiard Ball," for its inci-

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dental depiction of a sometimes very real mood generated in the world of science. Some of its best stories are those which are not "mysteries" at all, and are here on a semantic pass. But on balance, this is a poor book because it is a book about clevernesses, and clevernesses are not Isaac's long suit.

A man may master the mechanics of card tricks. Harder — or many of us would do prestidigitation all the time — is the cruel self-mastery that brings you on stage with an impenetrable smile at times when the morning paper says the world is mad, or some event in one's life teaches us, again, that love will wound at the least provocation. Harder, and destructive.

Dr. Urth knows this. He would, at the conclusion of "The Dying Night," like to travel back across the years to the girl in Lower Falls, New Hampshire. All he has, unfortunately, is a matter transmitter that will take him there now, a worse than useless journey. And it's late for girls, too. But I'm sure he's glad each time he can shake off the trivia of crook-catching, and can resume the privacy of his study, and think on love.

Dover, that truly excellent publishing enterprise, has sent me not one but two review copies of *The Best Tales of Hoffman* ($2.00) being a collection of works by E. T. A. Hoffman, who anticipated my own birth in Konigsberg by a matter of about a hundred and a half years. His birth year is 1776, as a matter of fact, and if these two things are not enough to convince you of his improbability, then consider the fact that he was a gifted music critic and competent composer, destined to find ultimate fame in the title of a mediocre work by someone else.

He was also very much a part of the general Romantic literary movement which reacted in some writers, such as Mary Shelley and Hoffman, to produce prototypical considerations of the man/machine confrontation under the guise of science fiction. (It's interesting that Lord Byron and Percy Shelley were too busy, in the end, to actually produce their aborted contributions to this sub-genre. Apparently, you had to be not quite first-rate to get it down on paper).

The volume is edited and introduced, it appears excellently, by E. F. Bleiler, who is the Everett Bleiler who co-edited Frederick Fell's old annual "Best" anthologies with Ted Dikty. Hoffman was not, blurb to the contrary, "one of the two or three greatest writers of fantasy." (Bleiler works for Dover). That is a very large

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chunk to chew off. But this man, who was real and who thought some very interesting thoughts, did lay down the groundwork for some of our most enduring themes.

I recommend "The Golden Flower Pot," "Automata," and "The Sand-Man" particularly. But there are seven others, and I think that if you get this book, read it and place it on your permanent shelves, you will come back to it often.

Science-fiction writers for, oh, thirty years, have been actively learning from Robert A. Heinlein. All of us, I think, have influenced our own careers by our private assessments of his technical accomplishments and his professional criteria.

Occasionally, some of this thinking has become public, a tricky business while your subject's still alive, because he can callously point out your factual errors, take personal umbrage, and otherwise refuse to hold anywhere near as still as he does when it's just you and your thoughts, musing of awards before an open fire.

Take, for instance, the time a famously sharp technical mind in this business produced a scholarly essay whose conclusion depended on the crucial assumption that Heinlein had never really tackled time travel before *The Door Into Summer*. The essay skirted only around the edges of the fact that the time-travel story in its most effective form takes the construction "the son is the father is the son hereafter," and never once mentioned "By His Bootstraps."

Such is the character of what musing on Heinlein can do to your otherwise deservedly famous analytical mechanism. Nevertheless, the Heinlein-chasers go on, as we all must, and we are now arrived at yet another generation of writers who have to cope with their relationship to him . . . the more so because he is getting old, now, and they are so young that in their eyes he has always had snow on his upper slopes.

It was about time that somebody attempted a full-scale study at thesis length, as Alexei Panshin has now done for Advent: Publishers, Inc.

Heinlein epitomizes all that is possible to the science fiction of the 1940's. This distinct breed of story seems to have developed as a natural response to the needs of people who got their undergraduate technological grounding in the 1930's, and is characterized by a belief in the liberating effect of the Sc. D degree.

An inspection of the best-received stories and series of the time will show that the hero is

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commonly a figure of lower middle-class origins, or alternatively of mysterious parentage, who emerges into his true artistocratic condition as a result of codified training and, often, supplementary tutelage at the hands of an avuncular figure. His maturity is signaled by such outward signs as the privilege of using lower middle-class slang in the laboratory, doodling wiring diagrams on the tablecloths of four-star restaurants, and the concealment of the title "doctor" until under attack by such father-figures as, for instance, hostile corporate attorneys.

Within and upon these parameters, Robert A. Heinlein has built a truly enviable career with remarkable elegance. He has struck the chord of liberation not only upon technicians but upon arts baccalaureate candidates, night school accounting students, chicken farmers, would-be science-fiction writers, editors of grocery trade magazines, infantry officers, former publicists for the NBC radio network, and all the other people who go on to make up the commercial world which we normally cite when we use the referent "contemporary society." He has even struck it in rebels against this world, by offering such 180-degree candidates a religion, in *Stranger in a Strange Land*. As long as you refer to the societal system whose central event was the Great Depression, Robert A. Heinlein can be found to have been your spokesman in some cogent way at least once, and probably quite often. And of course we all do, in at least some second-generation way, refer to that system. So Heinlein speaks to us even though he displays certain obvious impediments.

Among these impediments are: A restricted range of male characterizations; a craftsman's eye for prose functions, substituting the functions normally assigned to an ear for moods (Heinlein orchestrates everything like *Bolero*); an even more restricted range of female characterizations; and what is either a fault or another champion three-legged runner's talent—the frequently demonstrated capacity for producing a story which ends either before or after the clearly visible place where the plot resolves.

I think these characteristics arise from the way Heinlein taught himself to write, which in turn arises from how Heinlein is wired up inside. But in the interests of space, I will spare you. What is important here is that Alexei Panshin seems to have noticed all of these same things, though not in the same words, in his exhaustive study of Heinlein's writings and as much as is known of Heinlein's biography. Yet as I

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went through *Heinlein in Dimension* (Advent: Publishers, Inc., P.O. Box 9228, Chicago, Ill. 60690. Cloth. $6.00), it seemed to me — seemed forcefully, painfully, frequently — that Panshin had brought himself up to a crucial point, had perhaps even nudged at it, and then had gone off elsewhere. In part, this feeling arose in me because Panshin does not, in the end, come to any clear picture of what Heinlein's work means . . . what round his life has taken, what rough draft may today be discerned in the thing a future generation will descry as Heinlein's statement. It seems to me that if you're going to do a book about something, you should not in the end come out with a book about the parts of something, however faithfully you describe them and however thoughtfully you guess at their sometimes fairly obvious functions within the largely undescribed whole.

But let's take what I think is the key example, of where Panshin goes off beside the point and Heinlein makes it:

Panshin's description of *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, Heinlein's most recent novel, is crucially flawed by, first, his overlooking the central fact about the book and, second, by how close he comes to not overlooking it.

The overlooked central fact about *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* is that the hero is the computer, Mike. The problems in the story are most painful to the computer, the solutions imposed are best suited to the computer's comfort and as events close the ragtags, the lingering doubts and curiosities expressed by Manuel, the narrator, are the expressions of a spearcarrier wondering what happened after hero and heroine have reached the climactic interpenetration, and only the epilogue remains to be spoken.

Every review of *Harsh Mistress* I'm aware of made the intended error of mistaking viewpoint character for protagonist. (And your humble servant was most ludicrously in error of all, for it was in re-reading my own review in print that I finally caught on).

Panshin speaks of Heinlein's knowing full well what names mean. He has already said that "Michael" means "God-Like," and he brings this up in mentioning, disparagingly, that the machine is somehow more forceful than the narrator. He makes nothing of it, though — and he makes nothing of the narrator's name, which is Manuel. (The narrator, you may recall, has a prosthetic arm which he takes off or changes hands on at will, often — though not often to any overtly important purpose.) Manuel — and his fellow revolutionaries — respond as required, with their

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several talents, to the computer's shifting computations of the political events which, if they go wrong, will leave the computer intellectually sterile on the destitute, frigid body of Luna, after all the people in her tunnels have died. Again Panshin repeatedly cannot account for Heinlein's bringing peculiar marriage customs into the story. *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. Panshin makes a point of the title's overt meaninglessness, too).

Everybody knows, mind you, that machines have an excellent chance of attaining authority some day. (And everybody else writes books in which the viewpoint people either out-think or cower before some device which talks just like Jehovah, only louder. The former alternative contradicts the necessary premise that the machine is smarter than Man, while the latter contradicts visceral convictions. So these stories, while sometimes clever and occasionally admired by people who can suppress good sense with logic, are impermanent. *Mistress*, however, resolves things as they very likely would be . . . with even the most involved humans believing events had proceeded to their benefit, and perhaps feeling a little bit lost at the thought that somehow Mike, the ballistic computer, had gotten his exteroaffectors cut off by a lucky hit, but not really capable of reaching the truly monstrous realization that they had served their purpose and were now being ignored, all you zombies.

Read in the light of this reading of *Mistress*, Panshin's book changes character as bittersweetly as does a re-reading of the novel. Panshin cites persistent traits of Heinlein's stories: Boy Scout sexuality combined with freakish consummations; the super-competent character with the added super-talents such as having a perfect memory, a camera eye, a gift for mathematics, plug-in talents, etc. He notes Heinlein's obsessive denial of personal death, his conviction that survival is the only test. He touches on, though fails to nail down, Heinlein's converse conviction that it is also the only worthwhile challenge, in whose absence even genius languishes. Panshin asks, again and again, "But where is the ultimate working-out of this trait? Where is Heinlein going with it? Where is the sign?"

The sign may very well have occurred in *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*. There is more symbolism here than you'll find even in D. D. Harriman's shipping tag knifed into the pumice.

— ALGIS BUDRYS

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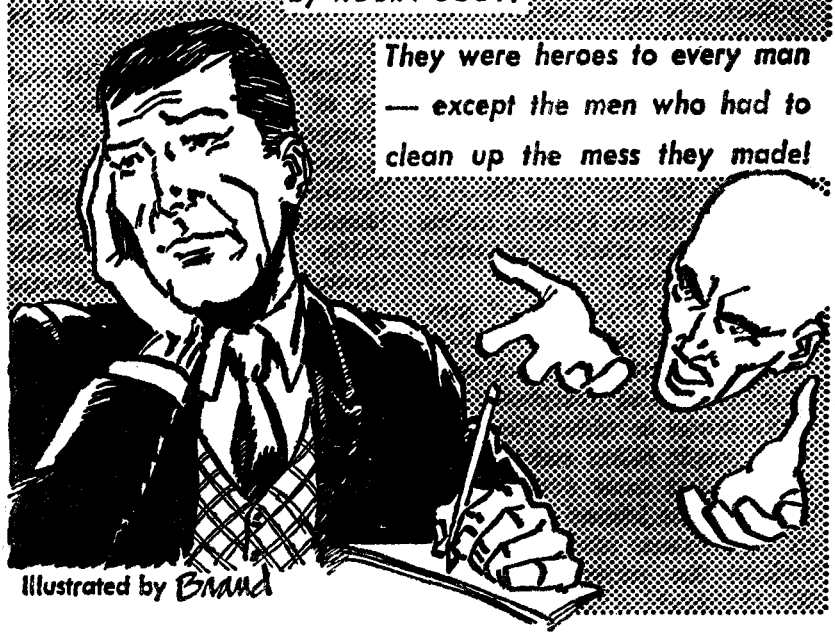
Seconds' Chance

by ROBIN SCOTT

They were heroes to every man — except the men who had to clean up the mess they made!



Illustrated by BRAND

On 16 June, Murphy's terminal report came into the Outfit's Washington headquarters from Tangier, where he was resting up in enviable luxury in one of those slick, new hallucinogenic resorts after his latest spectacular confrontation with what the Western press invariably referred to as "The Forces of International Communist Subversion."

Murphy is a great performer, one of the best in the business. While I envied him the white sand beaches and those nubile Nubians and the five-hundred-dollar-an-hour selective neural stimulation, I did not begrudge it him. I regretted only that what he had done to earn it meant endless hours of nasty work for me, cleaning up after him.

I had barely skimmed Murph's report — just enough to start my stomach aching — when my drab boss summoned me from my drab cubicle, presented me with a set of travel orders, and delivered his

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customary words of good cheer:

"Get your butt over there, Maxwell, and get that mess cleaned up. And if you spend one goddamn penny over authorization, you'll be down in the file room when you get back."

It saddened me how Jack's threats had declined in beauty and vigor over the years. Maybe I was getting used to them, or maybe now I had so little to lose that no threat was very meaningful. After all, you make a man feel pretty large if you tell him he must do so-and-so or he will lose his shot at the Big Prize. You do nothing at all for his ego if you tell him he has to do it or lose the miserable job he already has.

But I took his comments, as I had for some years, with considerable charity. He too was a disappointed man. He too had waited all his working life with the Outfit for the big chance to be a Number One. And he was now too old to hope.

At forty-three, I was very nearly too old myself. I was fully resigned to no greater expectations than to hang on to what I had and — at the most — to someday succeed Jack and snarl at other hopeless men, a far cry indeed from the glories we had both anticipated as young men.

So I didn't stay to argue as I used to do, but went straight to Disbursing, signed my life away for a stack of hundred-dollar travelers' checks, and hurried to catch the subway to New York and the afternoon Superson to Berlin. I did not want to tarry for the pitying looks of my younger, still hopeful colleagues in the Office of Claims, Field Settlement Division. Thirteen years of cleaning up after the legendary Murphy ought to have hardened me to those supercilious bastards. But it hadn't. I found myself comfortable only in the presence of my boss, who — as I have explained — was even farther down the road to permanent obscurity than I.

In the hovercab down the Potomac to the subway station, I caught myself laughing out loud, a bitter sort of laugh. What a state things had fallen into! There was a time when the Outfit recruited only men who had — the phrase ran — "a passion for anonymity." Well, it had all changed. Guys like Jack and I had the anonymity and $14,000 a year; guys like Murphy had the passion, not a shred of anonymity, and upwards of $35,000 a year plus a virtually unlimited expense account.

Back when I had joined up — fresh out of Vietnam, hungry to be a civilian again but unwilling to settle for the humdrum of

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business or academic life — the Outfit had seemed to promise an exciting and rewarding career. But then, about the time I got out of training, skilled in small arms, dead-drops, live drops, clandestine high-jinks of all kinds, the international espionage business went all to hell, at least as far as it involved the Americans and the Russians.

So you launch a major operation and find out the Sovs are deploying a brand-new multiple reentry fractional orbit bombardment system with a C.E.P. of a hundred yards and yields at the gigaton level.

So what? It doesn't effect the balance of power a micro-mini-milligram.

So you feed dozens of expendables to the opposition *apparat* and get hard information that there is going to be another Kremlin power struggle and the hard-liners will replace the soft-liners, or vice versa.

So what? The political inertia of a polarized world, the kill and over-kill, the second strike and third strike capability on both sides, makes intelligence information take on all the relevance and pertinency of medieval arguments about angels on pin heads.

The hovercab flopped down on the subway station apron like a landing gooney-bird, and I followed the rest of the passengers through the turnstile, down the drop-chute, and into the New York capsule. There was the usual muffled sigh, the gentle acceleration, and we plunged down the tube past the first sphincter. As it tightened behind us and we accelerated into the vacuum ahead, I tightened a few sphincters of my own. Tube travel frightens me. There is something of the claustrophobiac in all of us, and I never enter a capsule without remembering the holovision pictures of the Chicago pile-up in '81.

I sought distraction in my previous train of thought. Espionage is like religion, I thought, which shows you what foolish things you think when you are frightened. And they lost pertinacy at about the same time, I thought. And maybe there is some connection.

But granting that and having determined that a god is dead, how do you dismantle his church?

The answer is, of course, you don't. And the big-time espionage business is still just as big, still just as expensive. Only its purpose has diminished. Now it is a kind of international gladiatorial sport in which all participants are as careful as they can be not to do each other serious damage. Accidents sometimes happen. But I couldn't recall hearing of

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a real assassination attempt against a professional on either side since way back in the bad old days of Stalin. And even the professionals who foul up and are taken prisoner can count on all the headlines of a show trial followed by some sort of exchange on the old Powers-Abel model long before their prison pallor becomes very noticeable.

It is a grand game, if you are one of the few real players. Everyone in it recognizes it for the game it is. We benchwarmers, though, don't have such a good time of it. We do our menial tasks and wait with vanishing hope for one of our first-stringers to get knocked out of the game or to retire from old age.

But what the hell! I thought as the capsule zipped along its chordal tube a hundred miles beneath Philadelphia. What the hell; it is $14,000 a year, and there are two kids in college and there is the mortgage, and there will be retirement in another dozen years or so (fifty per cent of my high five). And for a lot of years it hadn't been so bad. There'd been the hope that maybe something would happen to Murphy, that maybe (contrary to all expectations) he'd grow tired of the big time, the limelight, the periodic performances, and retire while I was still young enough to step into his shoes.

Well, he hadn't. And I wasn't any longer.

But what the hell, it was a living.

I have always found East-West Superson flights disconcerting. You leave Berlin, say, at 3:00 PM and get into New York at noon. The other way is even worse. The stewardesses hardly have time to say "coffeeteaormilk," and for the passengers, there is hardly enough time for the psilobennies to take effect, much less wear off for the landing. But despite their lingering effect, I could not overcome the gloom of Tempelhof.

I hate jobs in Berlin. Not only has the whole population been raised on spy stories, but a considerable segment of it still lives in one way or another off the intelligence business. It may be still the best place in Europe to recruit expendables, but cleaning up after Murph there is a real Augean job.

The little gray man at the Tempelhof *Passkontrolle* desk was familiar, and he recognized me from previous trips. He waved my passport back into my pocket and gave me one of those sly, conspiratorial Berlin smiles. "Ah! Herr Maxwell! We have been expecting you!" His voice dropped to a stentorian whisper: "It is that the Murphy has been busy again, *nicht?*" He held up the

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previous day's edition of *Der Morgenpost*. There was a muddy picture of a group of policemen herding a gaggle of men in handcuffs into the back of a carryall ductor. Under the picture was an italicized headline, leaning against a row of exclamation points and proclaiming: "*Der Murphy hat wieder gesiegt!!!!!*" — "Murphy again victorious!" Under it was a small cut of Murphy himself, bearded and fierce, and a two-column story on the roundup of another Soviet spy ring in Berlin followed by a box score of Murphy's accomplishments against his opposite number, Yevgenyi Korniev. I noted that the Outfit's P-R section, big and well financed as it was, had fallen down again. The paper put the score at seventeen-fifteen. And there was no mention of the affair in Belgrade in '82, which actually made it eighteen for Murph.

"*Wunderbar,* the Murphy," said the little man, the glint of the devoted, loyal fan in his eyes. "Such a record! And against the Korniev!"

"Yeah, *wunderbar,*" I said. I returned the conspiratorial smile out of courtesy, without mirth. I did not want to get involved in a discourse on the relative merits of the greats of the past, although there was no doubt in my mind that Murph could have held his own with the very best of them.

The little man leaned toward me across his counter, laid a consoling hand on my sleeve, and let his angular face droop in good-natured sympathy. "But now, there will be much to do, *nicht?* Many, many people, Herr Maxwell. I do not envy you."

"Yeah. Well, we'll get it cleaned up." I was getting so that I could no longer bear even the most heartfelt sympathy. I turned away abruptly. "I'll be at the Hotel am Zoo if you come across anything."

The little man snapped his heels and touched his cap, pride and pleasure on his face. "*Jawohl!* Herr Maxwell."

The first thing was to get an ad in the papers. I telephoned it from my room at the hotel. First *Der Morgenpost* and then the mass-circulation tabloid, *B.Z.*:

> "Persons with valid claims for damages resulting from an incident at the former Sector Border, corner of Klemmke Strasse and Dannenwalder Weg, at about 0200 hours on 14 June, should contact Mr. Albert Maxwell, Room 243, Hotel am Zoo."

Both papers would hit the streets in the morning; I had the rest of the day to relax and readjust my plumbing after the trans-Atlantic time change. I unpacked, bathed, dined on room service

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Wurst und Schrippen, and stretched out on the eiderdown with a full bottle of Jameson to drink myself into a semblance of honest resignation, which meant forgetting for a little while a hundred other hotel rooms, two kids in college, the mortgage, and what I knew was coming tomorrow.

The next morning, I was up, shaved, and breakfasted well before the first knock on the door.

The Germans are go-getting people and — like I say — used to dealing with intelligence organizations. They get right on it, unlike the Italians and the Spanish. This is good, in a way. You can get an unpleasant job over with in very short order. The English are the worst. I've spent as much as two weeks in London cleaning up after Murph. The English are so goddam polite. And so law-abiding. They write letters first and call in their solicitors and telephone M16 or the War Office or Scotland Yard.

The first claimant was one of the easy kind. He had his ductor parked nearby, around the corner on John Foster Dulles Allee. I took the sidewalk there with him, photographed the hole in the right front pressure-shrouding of his '81 Opel and measured it. He had a claim, all right. The hole was from an old-fashioned .38 slug and not a nine millimeter rocket dart or one of those great big dumdum cannons the Soviets sometimes like to pack. I chipped his claim down from 200 marks to 60, paid him, got a receipt, shook his hand and exchanged conspiratorial Berlin smiles with him and rode the sidewalk back to the hotel. If only they were all that easy!

There was a line of people all the way down from my door to the bank of drop chutes. I groaned. Murph, the bastard, had outdone himself this time. Not ten o'clock and at least thirty people.

The first half dozen or so were broken glass cases. With German efficiency, they had all come with glazers' estimates in hand, and I paid up with argument. In all likelihood I was paying for a hell of a lot of damage that the Outfit really wasn't accountable for, but the time and effort of digging out all those slugs from baby carriages and highboys and antique Biedermeier clothespresses was far too great. Better to pay up. Even knowing that most of those people would be eagerly scanning *Der Morgenpost* and *B.Z.* for signs that Federov or one of his people was in town settling claims for *their* side so they could double their profits. Sometimes I think that between them, since the espionage business went big-time and public, the Outfit and the

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KGB have glazed half the windows in Europe.

I worked through the day and well into the evening settling claims. There were the usual flesh wounds and — of course — the beneficiaries of the expendables, and one unusual case of a man who claimed damages for involuntary *coitus interruptus* (which I paid, knowing damn well I'd have trouble with Disbursing over it), but no homicides showed up. I was grateful; but then it was only the first day. By eight o'clock I had finished 33 claims and paid out just over 8000 marks, which — in case you are not familiar with the rate of exchange — is about 2000 of your tax dollars.

I hung the *Nicht Storen!* sign on the door and went down to the dining room for a drink and some dinner.

Halfway through a greasy plate of *Schweinefleisch und Salzkartoffeln*, I looked up to see Federov standing expectantly on the other side of my table. Like most Russians in official jobs, he is about a ninety-five per cent pain, but in a curious way I was always glad to see him. He was the one man I knew — other than my boss back in Washington — who had no occasion to feel sorry for me. I rose, gave him a stiff, one-pump, Central European handshake, and

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waved him to a seat. I did not say, nor did he, "What brings *you* to Berlin?" We knew.

Instead, I said: "When are you setting up shop?"

Federov sighed with resignation. "The announcement will appear tomorrow in the press. You have already started, da?"

I nodded and chewed my *Schweinefleisch.*

Federov sighed again, a deep, White Russian sigh, the ridiculously wide lapels on his double-breasted suit sliding across each other like scissors. "It is a bad one, da?"

I nodded again and swallowed. "33 claims first day."

Federov shook his round head, slumped in his chair and ran a trembling hand through his thick, graying hair. "Every time with Murphy and Korniev —"

His voice trailed off. I knew what he meant. Both of them sprayed slugs and rocket darts like small boys peeing in the snow. Murphy alone was bad enough, God knows. But Murphy and Korniev together . . .

I finished all I could handle of the *Schweinefleisch* and rose to go. Federov looked at me pleadingly. I couldn't help feeling sorry for him, an unaccustomed emotion I rather enjoyed. Maybe it was the mutuality of our adversity. We'd worked quite a few jobs together over the past dozen

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years, and if anybody in the business had it rougher than I it was Federov. He had entered the KGB at about the same time I had entered the Outfit (I had seen his dossier as, I'm sure, he'd seen mine), and he undoubtedly had had the same bright dreams of glory. But his Number One, Korniev, showed every sign of being even more durable than Murphy, and he was a little younger, a little farther from retirement. Murphy might have outpointed Korniev over the years. But the Soviet establishment is a little smaller than ours, and in his own country Korniev was a real national hero. You couldn't pick up a copy of *Pravda* or *Novy Myr* without seeing a picture of him or reading an account of his latest confrontation with The Forces of Capitalist Reaction.

It's tough to play Number Two to a genuine champion. I know.

"Okay," I said, pulling the day's tally from my pocket. "Here's a list of the claims I've settled. But just once I wish to Christ you'd get some place before I do and save me all the work and money I'm saving you."

Federov grinned weakly and stuffed the list in his breast pocket. "Thank you," he said. "It is for our mutual good, after all. Perhaps, in time, these people will learn they cannot get away with duplicate claims."

"Fine," I said, turning to go. "I'm all in favor. But next time, I wish *you'd* pay some of *my* claims and give *me* a list."

Federov gave a comical shrug. "I will try, but you know Central."

I headed for the drop chute bank.

The next morning the line in front of the door was smaller. By three o'clock in the afternoon I had disposed of a dozen more broken glass cases, three ductor and two automobile punctures (only one of which I paid; Korniev had apparently been armed with a little Fabrique National dart-gun and it was easy to distinguish his workmanship from Murphy's), and a lady who claimed she had miscarried from fright. The price of miscarriages has gone way up in Berlin. I used to pay a flat 200 marks a throw back in '69 and '70, but since the East Germans took the Wall down, the price has more than doubled.

I got the cable from the Outfit just as I was leaving to go down to dinner. I decoded it with my electric razor:

FROM: THE OUTFIT
TO: MAXWELL
REF: OUTFIT 98043
COMPLETE BERLIN CLEAN UP SOONEST AND PROCEED

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TANGIER STOP MURPHY IN SHOOT OUT STOP INITIAL DAMAGE REPORT INDICATES SEVERAL DEAD AND EXTENSIVE PROPERTY DAMAGE STOP MURPHY TERMINAL REPORT WILL BE FORWARDED YOU IN TANGIER STOP YOU ARE REMINDED OF PRESIDENT'S CURRENT COST REDUCTION DRIVE STOP

Oh Christ! I thought. I'll bet he had that damn .375 Magnum with him, or maybe even the Armalite. They ought to take it away from him before he . . .

Sick at heart, I burned the cable, reassembled my Remington and went down to the dining room. Federov was already there, and he beckoned me to his table with a shaking forefinger. His usual worried expression had deepened.

"You have heard about Tangier?" he said as I sat.

"I have heard about Tangier."

"Shall we share a cab to the airport after dinner?"

I nodded as I stared at the menu and all the different ways they have for preparing *Schweinefleisch* in Berlin. Then it hit me. "You mean you're going to Tangier? You mean Korniev was . . ."

"Da. Korniev was also in Tangier." Federov spat a fingernail onto the carpet.

We dined in silence, smoked our cigars in silence and separated to clear our rooms. I packed, met Federov in the lobby and rode with him out to Tempelhof. We shared nothing but the fare and a series of resigned sighs.

And then, in the waiting room at Tempelhof, just before our Superson to Rome was due to be called, I was paged. There was a telegram. I left Federov staring gloomily out at the bright lights of the launch area, recovered my razor from my briefcase, and retired to the men's room to decipher the cable:

FROM: THE OUTFIT
TO: MAXWELL
REF: OUTFIT 98176
IGNORE INSTRUCTIONS REF STOP PERKINS WILL ASSUME BERLIN/TANGIER CLEAN UP STOP MURPHY PERMANENTLY DISABLED IN TANGIER AFFAIR STOP YOU HEREBY APPOINTED NEW CENTRAL EUROPEAN NUMBER ONE STOP UNLIMITED ACCOUNT ESTABLISHED YOUR NAME BANK SUISSE STOP YOU ARE REMINDED OF PRESIDENT'S CURRENT COST REDUCTION DRIVE STOP

I reassembled my razor in a daze. This was it! Finally it! I

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was Central European Number One! Thirty-five thousand a year and my own Swiss bank account! All kinds of passion and no more anonymity!

I grew aware of a buzzing and humming to my left. At another sink stood Federov, shaving a telegram. As he worked, his usually gloomy visage brightened visibly. A smile spread from one great drooping ear to the other. He finished and stood grinning at his reflection which was grinning back at him in the mirror.

I cleared my throat and he turned away from his satisfied contemplation. "You too?" I asked. "Did Korniev . . ."

There was new dignity in Federov's voice: "Da. There was a mistake. Comrade Korniev is incapacitated, and I have been appointed . . ."

I whirled and crouched, reaching for the minidart in my left sock. Federov leaped in a perfect *pas de chat* to the protection of a booth. I tried a snapshot at his feet under the door, and he climbed atop the toilet and tried a bank shot at me with his dumdum off the ceiling. It was plaster and didn't bank shot very well.

It was a standoff, and I paused to think.

"Federov," I called shrilly. "Hold it!"

"Da," Federov's voice echoed from the booth.

"Let's do this thing right. We're both out of practice, and someone could get hurt. And furthermore there's no press here."

"Da!" said Federov.

"Come on out and let's talk it over."

"Da. Only I stay inside the booth and we talk it over. You understand?"

I shrugged. "Okay. Look, let's get this thing organized and start off the right way. You get in touch with the Tass man and Deutsche Nachrichten Agentur; I'll call Reuters, UPI, Agence France Presse and AP. Then let's meet down along the old Wall line — say at the Checkpoint Charlie Monument — at about two o'clock."

There was silence in the booth for a moment and I began to worry about what Federov was up to. Then he spoke, his voice newly alight, full of suppressed excitement.

"All right, Mr. Maxwell. I will call Comrade Stoniev and Herr Lempke. But the old Wall line, Mr. Maxwell? Not the old Wall line. Korniev and Murphy, they always met down at the old Wall line. We must establish — how do you say it in your country — a new image."

I had to hand it to Federov. He was way ahead of me there. "You are entirely correct, Com-

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rade Federov," I said. "Let us meet—" I thought furiously—"let us meet in the heart of Berlin, in the bright lights and crowds of the Ku'udam, the most fashionable shopping street between Paris and Moscow!" I was astonished at the audacity of the idea and still I was very pleased with myself.

"Da!" said Federov with real enthusiasm.

"There are bright lights there," I said, growing excitement in my voice.

"And many great glass show windows," said Federov, his voice beginning to break with anticipation.

"And rows and rows of shiny, late-model ductors!" I nearly shouted.

"And hundreds of new holovision sets all with implosive tubes!"

"And windows full of expensive perfumes—"

"And rare antiques—"

"And bottles of booze—"

"And fine, inflammable clothing—"

"And . . . and . . . and—"

Federov broke from his booth, his dumdum dangling innocently at his side. We embraced each other and cried real tears of happiness.

— ROBIN SCOTT

∞

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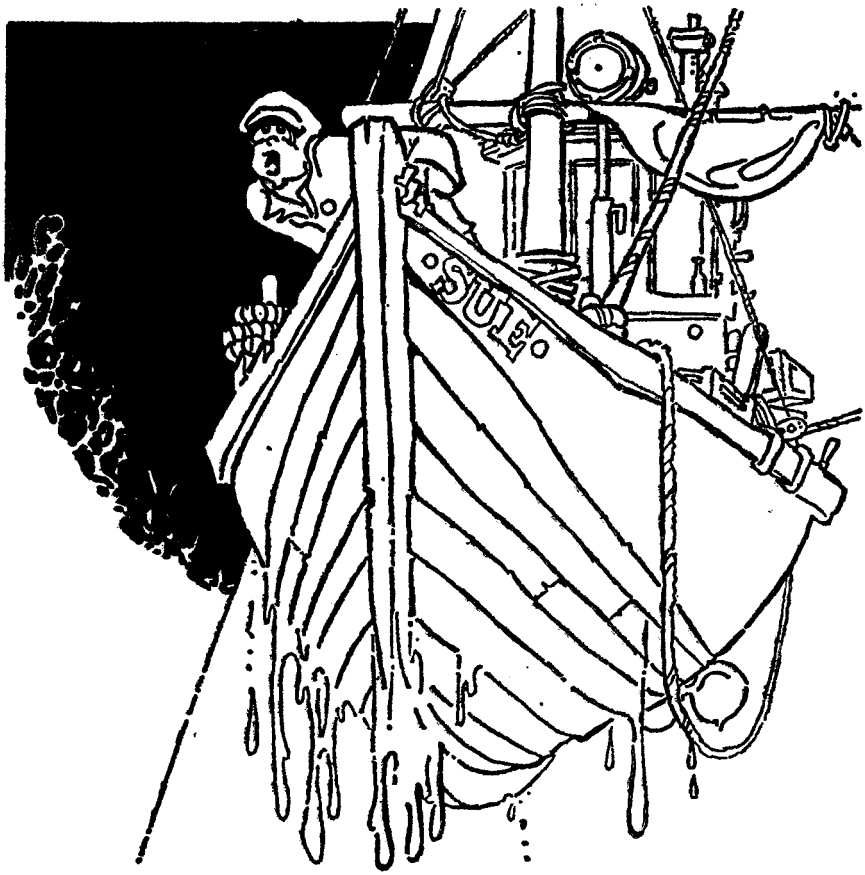

When I Was In The Zoo

by A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

Illustrated by BODÉ

When I was in the zoo the keepers were both kind and loving. Especially loving!

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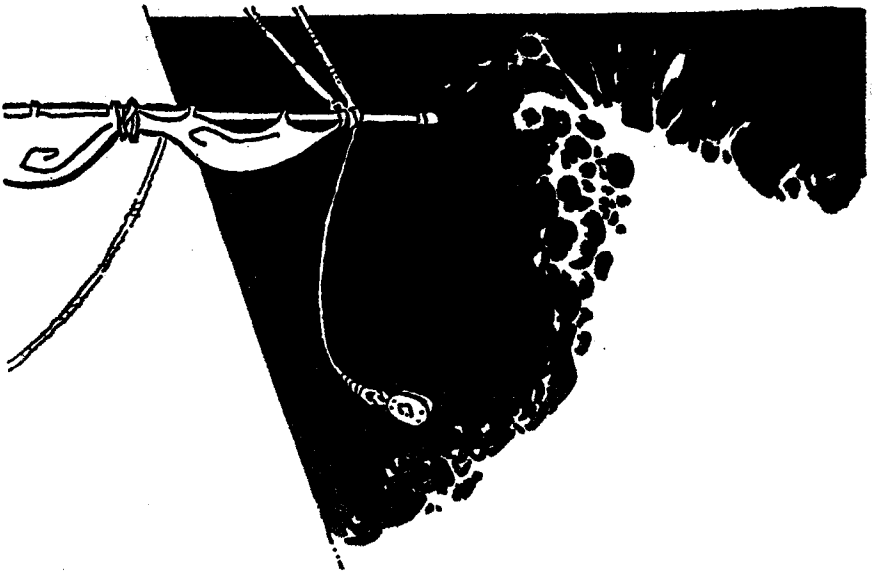

My wife often tells me that I know all about the harbor but practically nothing about half an inch inshore of high water mark. This is not quite the truth; I don't know quite as much about the harbor as I should, even though I hold a pilotage exemption certificate for the port. Nonetheless, my knowledge is somewhat greater than that of any non-seafarer, and on the occasions that we are visited by overseas friends she will lay on a tour of inland points of interest in the car, and I will play my part by organizing some sort of harbor trip.

The run from the Circular Quay to Manly is a very pleasant one, especially if it is a fine day and if the short voyage is made in one of the old-fashioned, double-ended ferries. The hydrofoils are all right for people in a hurry, but not so good for sight-seeing. And there is so much to see — points of historical interest such as Fort Dennison (known in the convict settlement days as Pinchgut) and Bradley Head, where stands the foremast of H.M.A.S. *Sydney*, famous for her sinking of the German surface raider *Emden* in the First World War. There are all the new things, such as the Opera House (regarding which I say nothing further) and

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all the mushrooming additions to Sydney's skyline. There is the Bridge, of course. And there is all the traffic, military and commercial, to anybody who loves ships a continual source of pleasure.

There were three of us making the ferry trip to Manly that day — two American friends, man and wife, both writers, and myself. We enjoyed the trip over and then, having disembarked, decided to stroll along the harborside promenade to Marine Land. Most of you will know what it is like — Marine Land, I mean — but just in case somebody hasn't been there I'll give a brief description of it. It's a huge, cylindrical tank, with ports of heavy glass in its sides. From the levels surrounding it you can look in at the inmates, while the inmates look out at you. There are the inevitable sharks and rays; there are one or two mossy-backed turtles; there are hordes of smaller fishes, all of them swimming round and round and round — for most of the time. As advertised, there are the merman and the mermaid.

The merman, an athletic young man in aqualung and black, skin-tight suit, was spending most of the time tinkering with the plumbing at the bottom of the tank. What exactly he was doing we never found out, but there were metal pipes down there in the sand, and there were joints in them, and he, with a Stilson wrench, was either tightening these or slacking them off. The fish ignored him.

The mermaid, an attractive girl similarly attired, was not ignored. She had brought a metal tucker box with her, and it was obvious that one and all knew what was in the box — and obvious, too, that the small fry knew that they weren't in the running. Her special pets seemed to be a largish shark, an evil-looking black ray, and one of the turtles. These fawned around her, more like persistent cats or dogs than the cold-blooded creatures that they were. The way that the ray was carrying on, as she took morsels of food from the box and put them into its mouth, reminded all three of us of the more lurid magazine covers. You know the sort of thing — beautiful Earth girl on the point of being raped by some alien monster. All of us had, from time to time, sneered at those covers — now it almost seemed that there might be something in them after all.

All the same, it was fantastic, and I said so. Those beasts — two fishes and one reptile — were behaving in a manner more typical of mammals than of their own species. I could see, I said, how a close bond of affection

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could develop between a human being and a porpoise — but between a girl and a sting ray it seemed neither right nor possible . . . .

"Everything is possible," suddenly said the little man who had been peering through the port next to ours. "*I* know."

We all turned to look at him. He was, as I have said, a little man — at first glance a very ordinary little man, casually attired in slacks and open-necked shirt, with brown shoes that had been polished last at least four days ago. His face was wrinkled and sun-tanned; his scanty, sandy hair had been brushed to cover a large bald spot, and his eyes were a faded blue. A fisherman, I thought. Professional or semi-professional.

"I *know,*" he repeated, with a change of emphasis.

It is always rather embarrassing when complete strangers break into a private conversation, and this man who had assured us that he *knew* (about what?) also knew how we were feeling. He went on rather hastily, "I heard you talking. You're writers, aren't you?"

We admitted it.

"Then I can talk to you," he said. "At least, I hope I can. I have to tell my story to somebody. I told it to the cops, and to their headshrinker and to quite a few more quacks in the same line of business. But they didn't believe it. They wouldn't believe it. After all, I'd been adrift in my dinghy for days, and it had turned my mind. It didn't occur to them that I should'a been at least half dead of hunger and thirst . . . ." He looked back into the tank, where the girl was now feeding the turtle. "That's why I come here, you know. So I can see for myself that such things *do* happen. So that I can be sure that it wasn't all in my imagination."

Edward and Nola Edwards looked at me, and I looked at them. Something very close to telepathy was established among the three of us. The man was a nut, we were thinking. But now and again nuts have stories to tell — and stories, after all, were our bread and butter.

"Isn't there a . . . pub near here?" Edwards asked me.

"More than one," I told him.

"Then I suggest that we . . . ah . . . adjourn for some refreshment." He turned to the little man. "And will you join us, sir?"

He said that he would.

We were a little surprised when the stranger — Clarry Simpson was his name — insisted on paying for the first round. And then, as we sat around the table, our cold beer

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before us, he started to talk. There are compulsive drinkers, and there are compulsive talkers. He came in the latter category.

I have to tell this story, he said. I have to tell it, and I hate myself for doing it, 'cause I know that every time I do they're saying, "Clary's off again. Been proper round the bend ever since he lost that *Sue* of his." *Sue?* you ask. No. Not a wife nor a girl friend. Just my boat — and a better friend to me nor any woman could've been. My apologies to you, lady."

Yair . . . *Sue*. We were on our way back from up the coast, Norah Head way. We were well outside, well outa the way o' those blasted colliers an' the like. Just meself there was; I was never one to be bothered wi' crew. Just meself, an' *Sue*'s diesel chuffin' away happily. Hardly any wind, an' a sky full o' stars, an' the loom o' Macquarie light bright on the starboard bow an' the glare o' the city lights fillin' the sky beyond that.

Not a care in the world I had. A good catch — even singlehanded you can manage quite well once you've got the hang of it — that'd fetch a good price alongside. More'n enough to pay all expenses wi' enough left over for coupla nights out. Can't say that I was payin' much attention to anything. As I always uster say, *Sue* could find her own way home without me botherin' her.

Then I heard it.

Like a big electric motor it was. Didn't pay much attention at first — there's so many fancy flyin' machines an' the like these days, an' the Air Force is always out playin' silly buggers round the coast at night. But I did look up, after a bit. Couldn't see any navigation lights, but that made sense. The R.A.A.F. out on exercises doesn't show any. There was somethin' there, though. I saw it, blottin' out the stars. An' I got scared. It was too flamin' big, and too flamin' slow. I've seen helicopters, an' this wasn't one. There was far too much of it, an' it didn't sound right.

I opened her up — *Sue*, I mean — an' damn the fuel consumption. (She was an extravagant little witch at anything like full speed.) I opened her up — an' for all the good it did I might just as well ha' stopped her, there and then. That flyin' thing was directly over me an' it stayed there, an' I could feel some sort o' force pushin' down on me. It was more than just feelin' it. I could see that the water around the boat was shoved down in a sorta depression. It was like bein' in the middle of a big, deep saucer.

Then the searchlight dazzled me. It was so bright, so blinding

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that I didn't realize that *Sue* and I had been lifted clear o' the water — though I realized it soon enough when her engine started to race. By the time I had her stopped I'd just time ter see that we were bein' pulled up through some sort o' round hatch. No, there weren't any winches or cables. Musta been magnetism or somethin' like it.

So there we were, *Sue* and I, shut up in a big, steel box like the hold of a ship. There were lights, but I couldn't see much by them; they were a funny sort o' blue an' very dim. But there was a three-cell torch in a clip in the wheelhouse, an' I used that to see what was what.

It was like bein' in a ship's hold, like I said. But there wasn't any way out. No ladders, no escape hatches, nothin'. An' I couldn't see any way o' openin' that hatch at the bottom that we'd been pulled up through. Just as well, perhaps, though I wasn't ter know that by this time we were miles up an' still climbing. Oh, yes, I could hear machinery, a whinin' sort o' noise, but it didn't make no sense ter me.

There was a hissin' sound, too, an' that didn't make no sense neither, not until I got a whiff o' the gas that they were pumpin' in — like a mixture o' garlic an' talcum powder it was — an' passed out.

After Edwards had bought a fresh round of drinks he went on.

When I woke up, he said, I wasn't in *Sue's* wheelhouse. I wasn't in that ship's hold. I thought at first that I was out in the bush. I was lyin' on rough, sandy ground. I could feel it without lookin' at it; somebody'd taken me shirt an' me strides an' even me jockey pants. It wasn't cold, luckily, an' it wasn't too hot. But it made me feel . . . naked. Damn it all, I *was* naked. An' I could tell that I was bein' watched.

I opened me eyes — and there was another pair o' eyes lookin' into mine. Cat's eyes. "Puss," I said. "*Nice* puss." I opened me eyes properly. It was a cat all right, but a big one. Too bleedin' big. Bengal tigers is all right when they're on one side o' the bars an' you're on the other, but when you're in the same bleedin' cage it ain't no bleedin' joke. I let out a yell you coulda heard from here to the black stump an' I was on me feet an' startin' to run — but I couldn't run. That was the worst part of it. I could only shuffle over that sandy ground, an' I could hear that blasted tiger shufflin' an' snifflin' behind me, an' all the time I was expectin' to feel his claws in me back.

An' then — how shall I put it — my fear sorta wore off. There

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was the feelin' that I had ter get some exercise walkin' around and walkin' around, an' everybody an' everything else in the big, transparent dome musta had the same feelin'. An' there all of us were — lions, an' tigers, an' a smallish elephant, an' a pair o' giraffes, an' — you name it, they had it. There was a sheila too, a black wench, as naked as I was, an' I was able ter catch up wi' her, but she didn't have no English an' seemed more scared o' me than she was o' the animals. It's a blow to yer pride, I tell yer, when a girl makes it plain that she'd sooner have the company o' a dirty great gorilla than yours!

So there we were, a regular Noah's Ark, in this enormous glasshouse affair about the size o' the Domain. There were trees, which looked fairly healthy, an' some sizeable patches o' grass, an' rocks, an' a shallow stream o' fresh water, an' bushes. But there wasn't a proper sky overhead. You could see the sheen an' shimmer o' the glass dome, an' beyond that what looked like plumbing. An' out towards the sides there was glass again — or somethin' like glass — an' outside that again there was . . . people. No. Not men an' women an' children. Their shapes was always changin'. Like big jellyfishes walkin' on their hind legs — if jellyfishes had hind legs, which they don't. But those did, an' arms of a sort, an' they were usin' 'em to point with.

Sorta lost count o' time, I did. Hadn't got my watch no longer, o' course. But every few hours the lights'd go out an' we'd sleep. Believe it or not, I got quite pally with that tiger an' I think he quite liked me. Like turnin' in with a big dog or cat on your bed, it was. Not that there was any bed — just the softest patch o' grass I could find. For drink there was the stream. At feedin' times the right sort o' tucker for everybody'd come droppin' down from up top somewhere. My friend Puss — I called him that — useter get some kind o' raw meat, an' I'd get a loaf o' bread an' a tin o' sardines. *They* musta checked up on what was in the locker in *Sue's* wheelhouse.

Every now an' again there'd be a new animal. The rhinoceros I remember — it looked at first as though the gas or the ray or whatever it was that they were usin' to keep us from flyin' at each other's throats wasn't goin' ter work. But before he did any damage he was as tame as the rest of us. An' there was a couple o' dirty great bears, an' some o' those little black an' white ones, an' a hippopotamus. They widened an' deepened part of the stream for him during a sleeping period.

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But the animals . . . I'd seen 'em all in the Zoo or in pictures in books or in films. It was the people — I'll call 'em that — who had me puzzled. I'd got the idea, somehow, that this was a big flying saucer that we were in, and that smaller ones had been coming down to Earth to collect . . . specimens. Yair. That's all we were. An' these people in the saucer weren't little green men from Mars or beautiful blondes from Saturn. They were . . . different. They were different, an' they were kiddin' themselves that they were as far above us as we're above dogs an' cats.

Perhaps they were, in some ways. But not in all.

Anyhow, one day a couple o' them came down into the dome with us. Like the man an' the girl in the tank they were wearing suits. Perhaps our air was different from theirs. Perhaps the suits were armor just in case any o' us was too handy with teeth or claws.

But the suits made them look more like people. A head, two arms, two legs, an' the sight o' transparent innards churnin' away decently hidden by stiff, white cloth. One o' them was carryin' a bag of odd-lookin' tools an', after he'd scraped the sand away from a manhole cover, started to fiddle around with a worm's nest of pipes an' wires that was under it. Needless ter say, I was interested. But every time that I got within four feet of him it was like gettin' an electric shock. After half a dozen tries — the last shock nearly flattened me — I decided to leave him alone.

The one in the other suit wasn't a "him" — it was a "her." Don't ask me how I knew, I just felt it. She was carrying a box. She squatted down under one o' the bushes an' opened the lid just a little. An' she . . . whistled. I don't know to this day if she was really whistling, or if she was just makin' the noise of it happen inside the brains of some of us.

But Puss heard it, an' that dirty gorilla heard it, an' the rhinoceros heard it. An' I heard it. So there were the four of us — the tiger, the gorilla, the rhino and the man — all of us running to where that . . . that girl was sitting under the tree. The smell that was comin' out of her tucker box was really something. You'd never appreciate it unless you'd been on a steady diet of dry bread and sardines. It was steak an' fryin' onions, rare steak at that, with a hint of grilled tomatoes.

Puss was all over her like a big house cat, until the gorilla managed to elbow him aside. (I wonder what *they* were smelling?)

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The rhino, not too roughly, managed to shove them away, and there was I, trying to get past that flesh-and-blood armored tank. I could see that she was giving them something out of the box. It seemed to satisfy them — and then it was my turn.

Her hand — yes, she had a hand — stretched out an' popped something into my open mouth. Yes, it was steak all right, just the way I like it done, an' so tender that it hardly required chewing. Yet that one little mouthful seemed to be lastin' an' lastin'. While I was eating I looked at her. Was I seein' her the way that *I* wanted to see her, or the way that she wanted me to see her? Somethin' of both, I guess. But she was a blonde, nicely tanned, an' she was wearin' one o' those bikinis that make a woman look more undressed than when she hasn't a stitch on, an' she had all the right things in the right places, an' her wide, red mouth was smilin' at me.

I swallowed what was left in me own mouth an' reached out for her. She came inter my arms willin'ly enough, or so it seemed, but it wasn't much of a kiss. It didn't last long enough. In no time at all she was pushin' me away, an' I could see why. That cobber of hers, the one who'd done the repair or maintenance, was standin' there glarin' at us. But he was only a . . . *blob* in a sort o' skin-diving outfit, an' she was a woman. Even though she was changin' back, slowly, to the way she had been when she'd come inter the dome, she was still a woman.

Well, that was the start of it. Every day — if they *were* days — the pair of them'd come inter the dome among the dangerous animals. He'd be playin' around the plumbin', an' she'd be feedin' her special pets. I don't mind admittin' that if I'd seen her as a purple octopus I'd a put up with her for the sake o' that steak, although it wasn't always steak. Now and again there'd be chicken — or somethin' that tasted like chicken — or prawns, or crayfish. An' there'd be little bulbs o' some plastic that burst in the mouth an' made you feel like you were gettin' outside a schooner o' good, cold beer. All that — an' a shape better'n anything you'll ever see at Manly or Bondi or even Surfers . . . .

She must'a seen the way that I was startin' to feel about her. In any case, I couldn't hardly hide it. An' those people outside the glass — it didn't matter about them. They weren't *real* people, you see. But she was, somehow. Every time that she put on her act — that *we* put on our act — it was costin' me more an' more

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effort to keep me paws off her. It was gettin' to be quite a strain, believe me.

Then one night, when I was sleepin', she came into the dome by herself. I woke up sudden like. There she was, standin' there. There was just enough light for me to see that she was wearin' a sort of transparent robe — although most o' what light there was seemed to be comin' from her body. She was all woman — or she looked to be all woman, an' what did it matter, anyhow?

She said, "Come with me." Her voice matched the rest of her.

"So you can speak English," I said.

"Of course," she told me. "We have been monitoring your radio programs for many years."

I was bloody annoyed then. "Then why do you treat me like a bloody animal?" I asked.

"Because, my dear, that is all that you are. That is all that any of your people are compared with Us." Then she said, all sweetness, "But you're a *nice* animal."

I should'a been ropeable. Where was me pride? I should'a been ropeable, but I wasn't. How does a dog feel when his mistress is nice to him? How does the ray in that tank back there feel when the girl lets him sort o' crawl all over her? There's more to it than just cupboard love, I'm sure o' that now. An' we've all heard the stories, haven't we, about men an' women an' the so-called lower animals . . . .

So I followed her, through the dome, walkin' around all the sleepin' beasts. It reminded me, somehow, o' the Garden of Eden. But there was the wench who should'a been my Eve, that black girl, cuddled up to that dirty great gorilla o' hers an' snorin' her head off. She was too fat, anyhow. I wondered what I'd ever seen in her.

We came to the wall of the dome. Suddenly there was a circular opening in it. She walked through, then she turned and said, "Don't worry. You'll be all right without breathing apparatus for about two hours. Our air's not exactly poisonous to you, although it should have quite a strong euphoric effect."

I asked her, "What's that?"

She said, "It will make you feel a little drunk."

Things, I thought, were getting better and better. I followed her along a sort of ship's alleyway, and in one part of it there were big ports or windows, and there was light shining through, like moonlight, but brighter. I had ter look out, of course, an' I rather wished I hadn't. It's one thing ter see the world from thousands of miles up in a film, an' it's another thing entirely ter *really* do it. But this air of theirs was doin'

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things to me. That was the Earth down there. So what? I could hardly care less.

She said, "We shall be moving on soon. We have almost a full set of specimens from your planet. By the time that we arrive at Lala'au their training should be completed."

"Their training?" I asked.

"Yes. Polardnor and I are the trainers attached to this expedition. But come."

Again I followed her. Finally she led me into a cabin — and it would'a made a first-class suite in the *Queen Mary* look like an aboo's humpy. Was it *really* like that? I don't know. Probably it wasn't — any more than she was *really* like the long-legged, lovely blonde that I was seeing. But there was a low table, an' on it a big bottle of champagne in a silver ice bucket, an' all sorts o' good things to eat . . . .

An' there was a bed, as wide as a footie field.

An' there was her.

I don't know what you'll think o' me when I tell you what I did. I know what I think o' myself. But she'd told me that we had two hours before I'd ter get get back inter the dome, an' there was that champagne, that I'd had only once, years ago, at me sister's wedding, an' there was that caviar (I think it was) that I'd never had at all. So we sat down, facing each other across the table, an' I worried at the cork o' the champagne bottle until it came out with a noise like somebody firin' off a six-inch gun, an' I poured the bubbly inter the two glasses. Oh, it was good, all right. Just like I remembered it, but better.

An' I never got around to tastin' that caviar.

The cabin didn't change — but the outlines of everything got sort of wavery, an' you could almost see through them. *She* didn't change — but she was fading and frayed, like, round the edges. The two who'd come in were in their own natural forms, jelly-men with a pair of arms too many, just blobs where their heads should have been, all sorts of wriggling, brightly colored coils inside them. One of them, I knew, was her partner Polordnor. The other one was the captain.

They weren't saying anything. Not out loud, that is. But they were *thinking*. Telepathy's the word for it, isn't it? I could pick up *her* thoughts, but only a word or so of the others'. It was almost like listening to only one end of a telephone conversation.

Bestiality. That was from Polordnor.

I have my methods. That was from her. *They are always successful*.

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Then the thoughts were cracklin' around me like lightning bolts. I've had ter tangle with jealous boyfriends an' husbands before — I still don't know which this Polordnor was — but the jealousy in this case was more than . . . sexual. It was professional. And as for the sexual part of it — haven't you often wondered just what sort of relationship exists between lady animal tamers and their beasts? Maybe I've a dirty mind. And maybe I'm speakin' from experience.

Well, I was just sittin' there, wonderin' what was goin' ter happen ter me. Polordnor was wantin' to have me shot at once, or somethin' equivalent. The captain, I sensed, was inclined to take *her* side. But it all seemed to be somethin' like the system of command in a whale factory ship. You know. When she's functionin' as a factory the factory manager gives all the orders. When the whalin' is finished, the Old Man takes command again.

Then she said to me, speaking this time, "You will not be harmed. We shall return you to where we found you."

What they used on me I don't know. It could have been gas, it could have been some sort of ray. But I blacked out, and when I came to I was in the dinghy, bouncing up and down in a bastard of a swell, an' with the lights of Sydney just a glow in the sky to the south'ard. What happened to *Sue* I don't know. Could be that the engineers in that blasted flyin' saucer took her apart ter see what made her tick.

Almost got run down twice that night — or early morning, rather. Then it wasn't too bad. The first ship along — Dutch, she was — spotted me an' picked me up. An' they were decent enough, too, to break out one o' their cranes to hoist my dinghy aboard. Just as well, that was. Although it was just as well, too, that nobody found that ingot of gold hidden under the bottom boards. Almost never found it myself. Then it was a helluva worry flogging it without losing too much on the deal.

And there was somethin' else I found — although it had faded by the time that I was picked up. It was like a tattoo, a luminous tattoo, on the skin o' me belly. There was only one sentence.

I shall be back.

There was a silence. I looked at Edward and Nola Edwards. They looked at me. None of us wanted to look at the little man, but he looked at us.

"Well?" he demanded angrily. "Well?"

"It's . . . It's a good story," I said.

"*Do you believe it?*"

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Again we looked at each other. Professional writers are apt to take a very dim view of outsiders who actually see flying saucers and make contact with their crews. And, even in this case, one of the crew had turned out to be a beautiful blonde after all, although not from Saturn.

"*Do you believe it?*"

"There's a certain absence of definite proof," I said at last.

"I *could*," said the little man, "let you know where I disposed of that gold. But gettin' meself murdered isn't my idea of fun. But —" he was very bitter — "I thought that *you* people'd believe me. But no. You're as bad as all the other bastards — the cops and the head shrinkers."

"A very good day to you all."

And that was almost the end of it.

The real end was — I suppose — a few days later, when I read in the morning paper that a search was being made in coastal waters for the missing *Sue II*, the owner and sole crew of which was a Mr. Clarence Simpson.

At about the same time, too, there were one or two UFO sightings off the New South Wales coast.

—A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

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2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY

Reviewed by LESTER DEL REY

Nobody slept at the New York press preview of *2001,* but only because the raucous and silly noise from the sound track screamed painfully into our ears. Space was a tumult of din and the hero breathed in his spacesuit like a monstrous locomotive at 60 gasps a minute. It was the only evidence of excitement in the place. Almost half of the audience had left by intermission, and most of us who stayed did so from curiosity and to complete our reviews.

The pictorial part was superb. The color photography was generally excellent, and the special effects and technical tricks were the best ever done. Even the acting was unusually good. With all that, Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke should have given us the superlative movie promised by a barrage of publicity. If they had put Clarke's *Earthlight* on the screen with equal genius, it would have been a great science-fiction movie. Unfortunately, they didn't. Instead they gave us dullness and confusion.

The whole affair dragged. Every trick had to be stretched interminably and then repeated over and over again. Nothing was explained or given coherent flow, but everything was run on to boredom. Further cutting might help; surely it couldn't hurt.

The story staggers through four vaguely related episodes. First we get the theme of man's humanoid ancestors being given intelligence by an alien slab only to become murderers. Next we go to the moon to find future men have dug up the same slab — excellent background but no drama — and no reason for it being there. Then we take a trip to Jupiter because — as we learn eventually — men think the slab came from there.

This episode has a conflict between men and an articulate

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computer. It might have been good, except for the lack of rationality. No motivation is provided for the computer's going mad, and the hero acts like a fool. He knows the computer can't be trusted, and we've seen that the computer can at least operate a rescue craft to bring back his dead friend. But he goes out himself, leaving his companions in hibernation to be killed by the computer.

Finally, we get an endless run of obvious and empty symbols on the screen, followed by our hero in a strange room. Apparently he's undergone intergalactic transfer and now grows old and dies in the room, followed by a metaphysical symbol at the end .The alien contact we've been promised is no more than a brief shot of the slab again.

If possible wait to see it for the effects until you can buy the soft cover book. Book and movie don't entirely agree, but maybe the book will provide some relief to the confusion of the movie.

The real message, of course, is one Kubrick has used before: intelligence is perhaps evil and certainly useless. The humanoid reaction and pointless madness of the computer show this. Men can only be saved by some vague and unshown mystic experience by aliens.

This isn't a normal science-fiction movie at all, you see. It's the first of the New Wave-Thing movies, with the usual empty symbolism. The New Thing advocates were exulting over it as a mind-blowing experience. It takes very little to blow some minds. But for the rest of us, it's a disaster.

It will probably be a box-office disaster, too, and thus set major science-fiction movie making back another ten years.

It's a great pity.

— LESTER DEL REY

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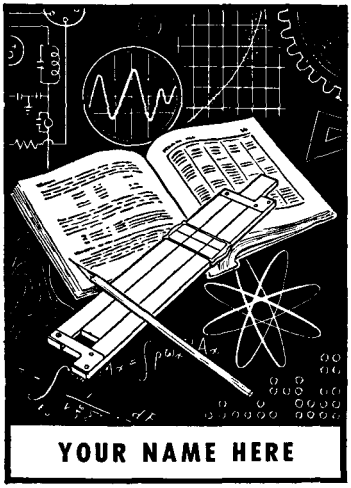

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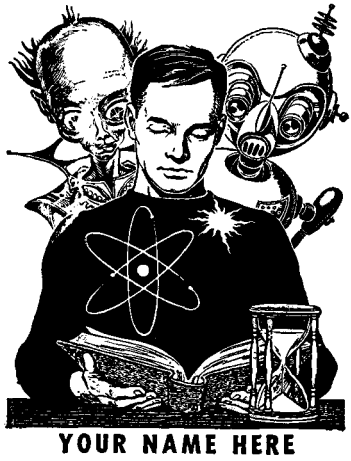

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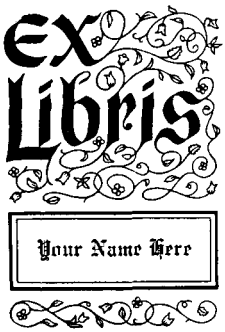

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